Chapter Three

The Battle for France

The battle for France created unprecedented challenges for Allied tactical air forces. Not even the famed mobile warfare in the deserts of North Africa could compare with the headlong dash of George Patton's Third Army from Normandy southeastward to the German border in the summer and fall of 1944. At the start of this campaign, O. P. Weyland and his staff could call on little combat experience beyond directing fighter-bomber operations from IX Fighter Command in England in June and July of 1944. Now, in France, Weyland decided how best to support Third Army in what quickly became a *blitzkrieg*. At one point in mid-September, the XIX TAC would perform a variety of missions at five different locations across a 500-mile front. To keep pace with and support Third Army, Weyland had to modify and adapt tactical air doctrine and conventional methods of communication and organization.

In all theaters of war, AAF doctrine called for centralized air control, for the concentrated use of air power, and for tactical missions flown in the prescribed order of air superiority, interdiction, and close air support. Yet these precepts, which applied most readily to positional warfare, failed in a fluid situation that called for selectively applying air power to support constantly moving ground forces dispersed over an expanding front. To direct aerial attacks on the enemy successfully in this kaleidoscopic environment, and to move and relocate air bases quickly, Weyland found it necessary to decentralize operations, disperse his forces, and delegate more authority to subordinates. In some cases he simply "threw away the book" and improvised as circumstances dictated. If the *Luftwaffe*'s weaknesses in 1944 permitted tactical airmen the flexibility to modify doctrine and improvise to solve operational problems, the demands of mobile warfare severely tested their solutions. In that testing, Weyland relied on the goodwill of the men in the air and on the ground, and on the good relationship already established between his command and the Third Army. In that relationship, cooperation and mutual respect became the keys to success for the XIX TAC–Third Army team.[1]

Exploiting the St. Lô Breakout: Blitz Warfare U.S. Style

On the morning of August 1, General Bradley met with General Patton and his staff and corps commanders to discuss how Third Army could best exploit the breakthrough which already found VII and VIII Corps troops moving forward 30 miles south of St. Lô. Having secured the base of the Cotentin peninsula at Avranches, Allied leaders realized their forces not only could swing west into Brittany and seize the Breton ports as planned, but by swinging east, they also could move around the German left flank toward the Seine River and Paris. Accordingly, Third Army received a three-part mission: first, drive south and southwest from the Avranches region to secure the Rennes and Fougeres area in eastern Brittany; second, turn west to capture the Brittany peninsula and seize the ports; and third, simultaneously prepare for operations farther to the east. To carry out this mission, Third Army gained the VIII and XV Corps on August 1, with the XX and XII Corps scheduled to become operational and join them on August 7 and 12, respectively. Under Maj. Gen. Troy H. Middleton, VIII Corps would exploit the breakthrough at Avranches and move westward into Brittany. While XX Corps, commanded by Maj. Gen. Walton H. Walker, readied its forces to move south later, Lt. Gen. Wade H. Haislip's XV Corps would push south toward Fougeres.

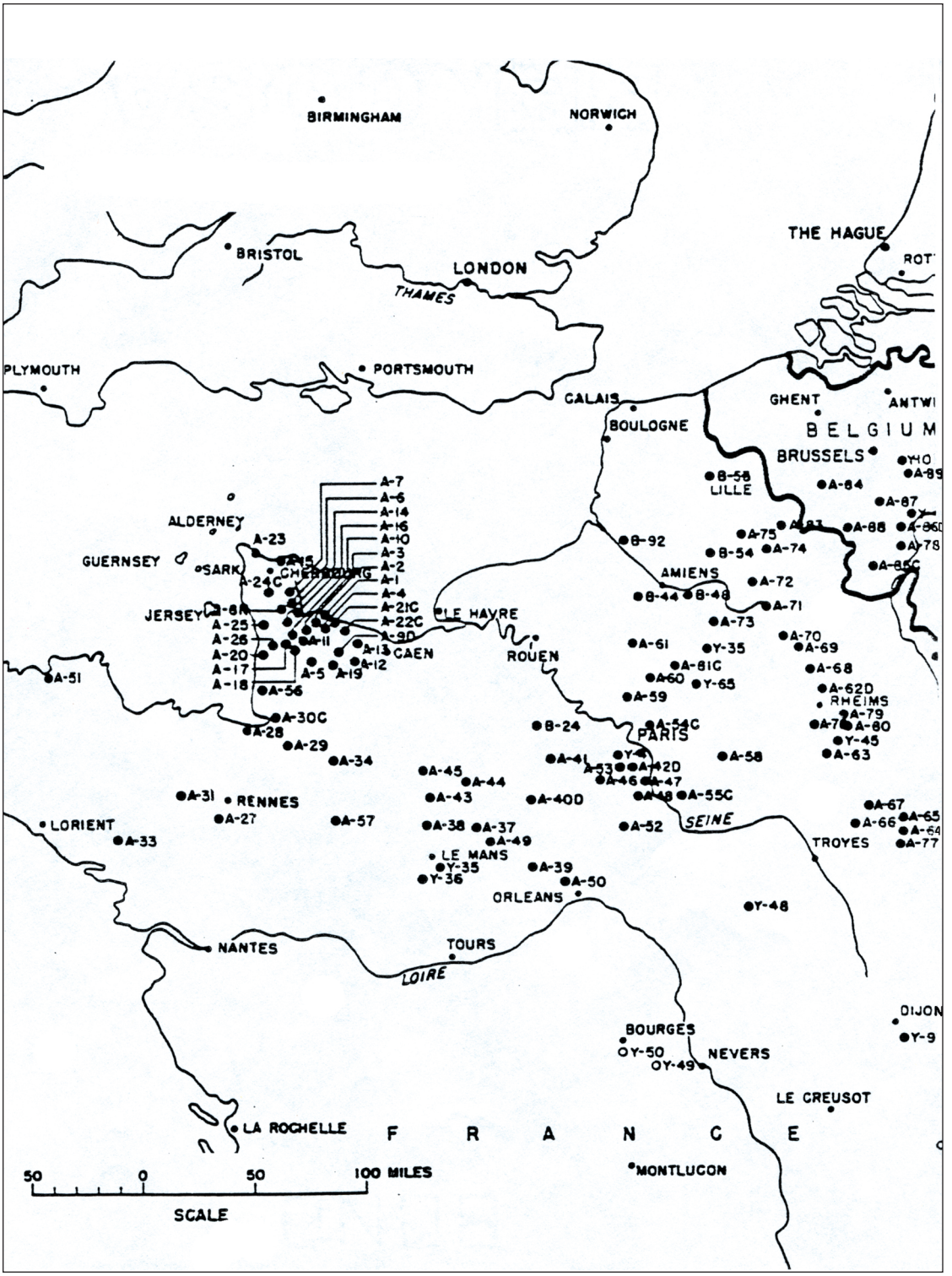
In this plan, XIX TAC's mission centered on supporting the VIII Corps' offensive with an initial force of three P–47 groups, the 358th, 371st, and 365th Fighter Groups, which at that time continued to operate under the control of General Quesada's 84th Fighter Wing. In early August, Weyland had no night fighter units and only one tactical reconnaissance squadron—the 12th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron based at LeMolay in Normandy. The XIX TAC would receive additional flying groups based on the success of Patton's drive south and east.[2]

Maj. Gen. Troy Middleton, commander, VIII Corps, aboard the USS *Ancon*.

The first week of August set the tone for the first month and a half of mobile operations in France. Third Army and XIX TAC planners met on July 31 to confirm an earlier decision to move XIX TAC's advance headquarters with Third Army's forward command post during the forthcoming campaign. The emphasis on mobility began that day, when Patton announced that Third Army's command post would move immediately to a location five miles northwest of Coutances. Weyland agreed to join the army's command group at its new location the following day, on August 1. By late evening of the thirty-first, XIX TAC's advance headquarters was in place and ready for operations the next day. The air command's headquarters would move an additional four times during August and twice more in September. Shortly after midnight, Weyland called Ninth Air Force headquarters to declare his forces ready for operations and to review plans for the following day. It became a daily custom for the commander of the tactical air command to call General Brereton or, after August 6, Lt. Gen. Hoyt S. Vandenberg, his successor as commander of Ninth Air Force, on the Redline command net to discuss procedures, review the previous day's operations, and discuss the course ahead.[3]

During his conversation with General Brereton in the early hours of August 1, Weyland recommended reversing the locations of the 84th and 303d Fighter Wings. The latter, which arrived at Criqueville (A–2) from England on July 26, thus would be moved and positioned near Brucheville airstrip (A–16), 15 miles closer to the flying units it would control in Normandy when the command became operational (**Map 4**). The IX TAC's 84th Fighter Wing would maintain flying control of the three groups initially assigned to Weyland's command until the 303d Fighter Wing was in place and prepared to relieve the 84th. The XIX TAC's second wing, the 100th Fighter Wing, which had arrived at Criqueville earlier on July 4, would remain nonoperational until the command gained flying control of all assigned fighter groups. During mobile operations in France, the XIX TAC, unlike other commands, preferred to locate its fighter control center near wing headquarters and its airfields, rather than near the advance headquarters' combat operations center. Plans and directives originated at the combat operations center, but allocation of missions and flying control of the groups were wing responsibilities.

The XIX TAC's more decentralized organizational approach called for the wing, which the planners normally established between the advance and rear headquarters, to relay operational orders and reports to and from the flying groups and assist the rear headquarters. Rear headquarters handled administration, supply, training, and personnel matters. At the outset of the campaign, by making wing headquarters the center of the communications net, planners expected the XIX TAC advance headquarters to be able to move forward with Third Army's forward echelon headquarters and maintain communications to groups with a minimum of required new installations. As Weyland would soon learn, in the practice of mobile warfare, even more decentralization would be



Map 4
U.S. Airfields in France, 1944-1945

Reprinted from: Rpt, AAF Evaluation Board, ETO, "Effectiveness of Third Phase Tactical Air Operations," pp. 327-328, AFHRA.

necessary if his advance headquarters was to keep up with Patton's headquarters *and* maintain reliable communications lines to his own forces.[4]

On August 1, 1944, however, Weyland faced other, more pressing command problems.[5] That day Ninth Air Force commander, General Brereton, left France for England to assume command of the First Allied Airborne Army. Before leaving, he called and informed Weyland that his deputy, Maj. Gen. Ralph Royce, would also be away temporarily and that Maj. Gen. David M. Schlatter would be setting up the Ninth's advance headquarters a few miles north of Coutances near the headquarters of the 12th Army Group. Consequently, Quesada, as commander of the IX TAC, would coordinate flying responsibilities and division of flying groups between the IX and XIX TACs. Quesada and Weyland could rearrange the wings as they saw fit without any need for formal orders. Anxious to have his own team in charge, after conferring with Quesada, Weyland assigned to the 303d Fighter Wing control over all XIX TAC fighter groups. That evening the 303d headquarters arrived near Brucheville (A–16) from Criqueville (A–2), to join the 84th Fighter Wing, which would remain there until it replaced Quesada's 70th Fighter Wing at Criqueville, when the latter moved south of St. Lô (**Map 4**).

During the initial week of combat operations, Weyland's command and control procedures evolved as his forces and responsibilities with Third Army grew. Only by August 8, 1944, when his command was at full flying strength with nine groups, did his two wings exercise extensive operational control. At least until mid-August, the 405th Fighter Group remained under IX TAC's 70th Fighter Wing for operational control. Early August would be a period of transition, one in which fighter-bomber groups moved from IX TAC to XIX TAC—and in some cases back again. The planners developed and refined organization and operational procedures in response to a growing Third Army and its requirements for ever greater tactical air support.

Although weather grounded Weyland's fighter-bombers in the morning of August 1, in the afternoon he sent the three groups covering VIII Corps on two types of missions. The 358th Fighter Group flew armed reconnaissance into the Brittany peninsula to explore the path ahead of VIII Corps' armored spearheads, while the 371st and 365th Fighter Groups provided cover for elements of the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions, respectively.

Armed reconnaissance normally involved squadron-size formations of eight or twelve P–47s armed with 500-lb. bombs and with armor-piercing incendiary .50-caliber ammunition for the aircraft's eight machine guns. The P–47s roamed well beyond the bomb safety line, the boundary within which all bombing was controlled by an air liaison officer. In enemy territory they searched for targets of opportunity, such as enemy troop concentrations or armored forces either fleeing or approaching the front lines. Patton's swift advance often caused the bomb line to change several times a day, frequently requiring pilots to update their maps while airborne.[6]

Crews arming P–47s with 500-lb. bombs and .50-caliber ammunition.

The more highly publicized second tactical role, armored column cover (which was first used at St. Lô in conjunction with the Cobra breakout) became a standard feature of air-ground cooperation in the dash across France. General Weyland did not alter the original procedure significantly. He normally assigned one fighter group to each armored combat command and made it responsible for providing squadron coverage continuously during daylight hours. Air liaison officers attached to the armored columns controlled the missions either from tanks or other armored vehicles by means of SCR–522 VHF radio. Ordnance carried by the aircraft varied with the amount of enemy armor and German fighter opposition expected. In areas where enemy fighters were active, only a third of the aircraft were bombed-up. Where armor opposition was light, P–47 pilots carried fewer bombs and resorted to strafing attacks. The airmen considered strafing enemy forces the most effective form of attack during combat in France and German prisoners agreed.

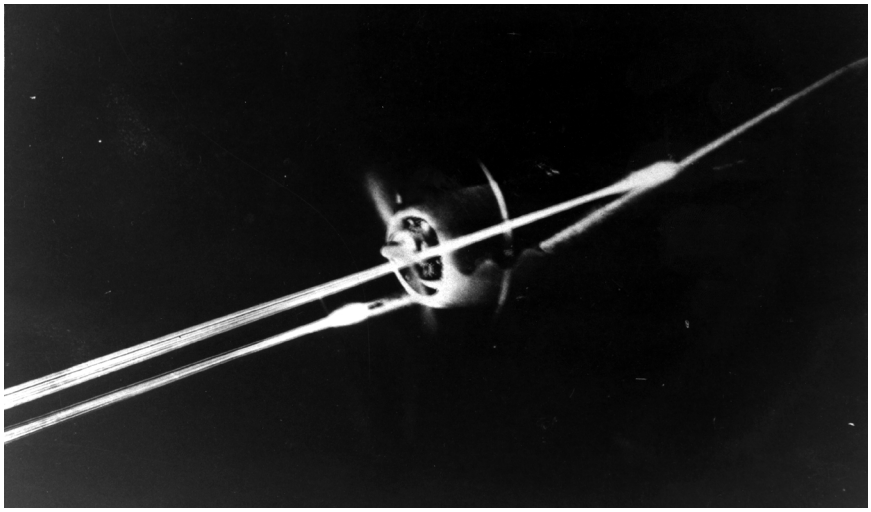
It became common practice for Weyland's fighter-bombers to patrol as much as 35 miles in front of Patton's columns to search out and destroy potential resistance and keep the columns informed through the liaison officers of what lay ahead. The column cover force often performed armed reconnaissance in addition to a close air support mission, which made distinguishing between the two missions difficult for the statistical control section. Furthermore, the Third Army staff asked the airmen to report the location of the Third Army spearheads, which frequently outdistanced their own communications. In an air role reminiscent of the observation mission in World War I, it became customary for pilots to identify Allied ground units throughout the campaign, and the last section of the daily mission report listed all forward sightings.[7]

Because of the fluid tactical situation, close control and flexibility in planning became paramount. As a XIX TAC official observed, Patton quick-

An air-ground officer directs aircraft near the front lines (above); a Ninth Air Force tactical liaison officer with the Third Army uses a radio to direct fighter-bombers to enemy targets (below).

ly "turned the interdiction job inside out," requesting air power to prevent German troop movement out of, rather than into, the battle zone. In Brittany, for example, the fighter-bombers accelerated Third Army's rapid advance with column cover and armed reconnaissance missions, and thus prevented German counterattacks from developing. Crews for XIX TAC received explicit instructions not to destroy any bridges in the Avranches area, which already had become a bottleneck for Allied traffic. Except for the Breton ports, Patton's three armored columns bypassed any German strong points along the way that might impede the advance. If, as some critics have charged, Patton proved more adept at pursuit than destruction of the enemy's forces, it is hard to fault his tactics during the westward thrust in Brittany.[8]

For XIX TAC aircrews, Patton's *blitzkrieg* tactics meant that planning often took place in the cockpit while airborne, in response to swiftly chang-



Night armed reconnaissance missions used tracers with .50-caliber ammunition.

ing requirements of Third Army troops. It also meant that tactical air power served as an air umbrella in highly mobile warfare, a coverage that FM 100–20 (1943) judged "prohibitively expensive" and effective only briefly and only in a small area. Doctrinal reservations aside, Weyland always defended his use of air cover for armored spearheads because the mobile warfare that Patton favored left too little time for artillery to be brought forward. Weyland and other tactical air leaders set aside established mission priorities in favor of a pragmatic response to mobile operations. General Weyland, however, would have been the first to agree that the existence of Allied air superiority, air power's first priority, made armored column cover possible by releasing large numbers of aircraft for close air support.[9]

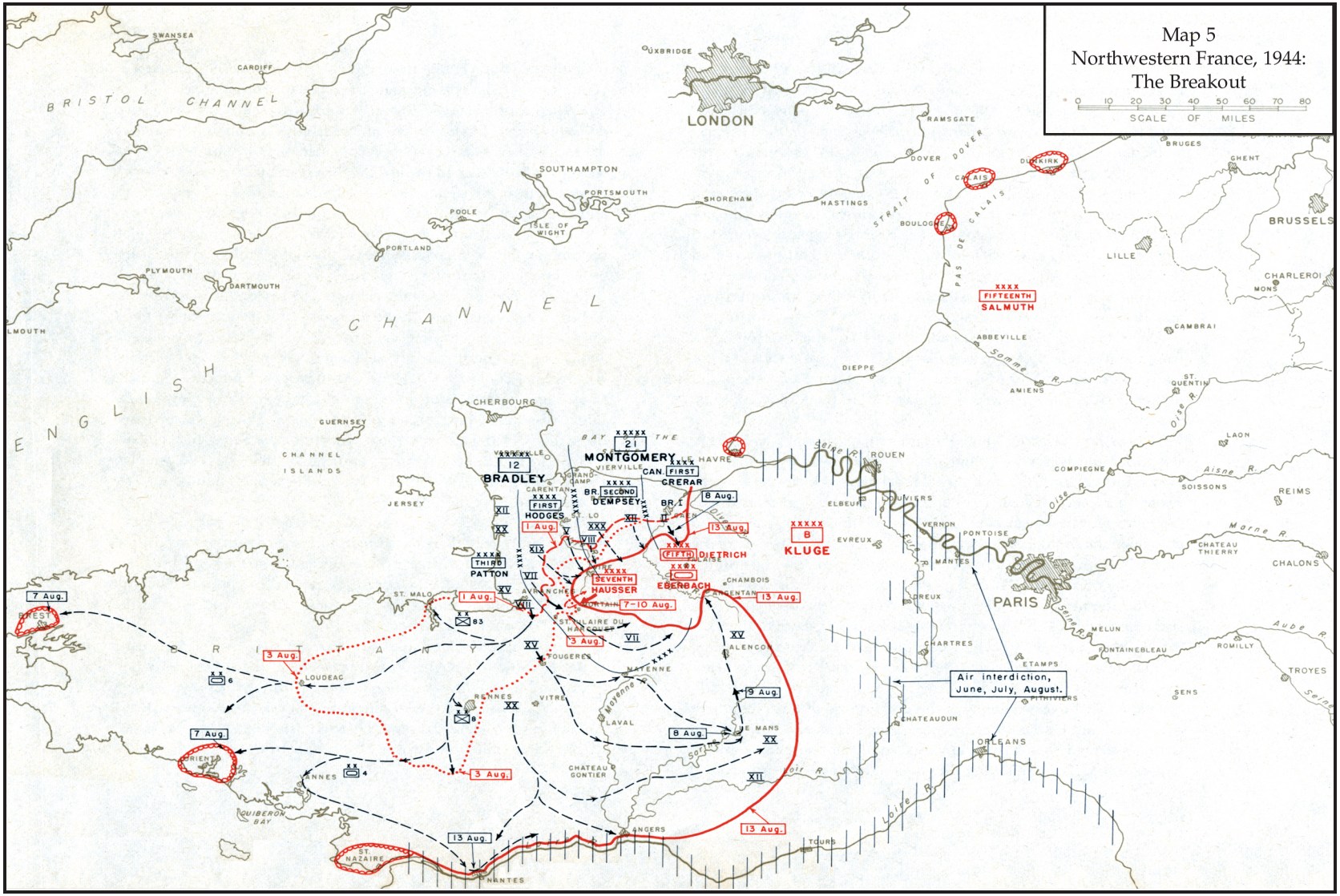
At the end of August 1, 1944, the 4th Armored Division approached Rennes, 80 miles south of St. Lô. Its highly regarded commander, Maj. Gen. John S. "P" Wood, worried about a counterattack from a possible German column moving from the southwest. With XX Corps scheduled to move south through the Avranches bottleneck the next day, Weyland's forces found themselves stretched woefully thin because of commitments to cover the armored divisions and fly armed reconnaissance throughout Brittany and as far south as the Loire. Once again he contacted Quesada for support and received two additional fighter groups for the following day.

During the next four days of the Brittany Blitz,[10] between August 2–5, Patton's forces overran the entire Breton peninsula and laid siege to the port

fortresses at St. Malo, St. Nazaire, Lorient, and Brest (**Map 5**). At the same time, XV and XX Corps moved rapidly south in the direction of the Loire River and swung east toward Paris. Ninth Air Force increased the aircraft in General Weyland's force accordingly. On August 2, he received the 363d Tactical Reconnaissance Group, the command's second P–51 group, and the 405th P–47 fighter group, which would gain a reputation as one of the Allies' top close air support groups. By this time, the 303d Fighter Wing had assumed responsibility from Quesada's 84th Fighter Wing for administration and control of the five XIX TAC groups and the command's fighter control center. Ninth Air Force's schedule of operations for August 2 reflected the rapidly changing situation as well as the flexible nature of tactical air power. It contained a long list of specific assignments for each of General Quesada's IX TAC groups supporting First Army. Weyland's five groups, however, could be assigned targets entirely "at the discretion of the CG [commanding general] of XIX TAC." The first stage of mobile warfare already compelled the air leaders to decentralize operational control.[11]

A host of problems had to be solved during the first week of August. The shortage of air support officers for ground units led the list. The very first request Weyland received on August 1 was a plea from VIII Corps to find two additional liaison officers for Brig. Gen. Herbert L. Earnest's Special Task Force A, preparing to attack along Brittany's north coast. One air support officer per armored division had proved insufficient because of the division's practice of creating combat commands or special task forces in pursuit operations. Because the air liaison function had not been included in the original personnel authorizations, the tactical air commands had to assign liaison officers to the ground units from their own organizations. Weyland managed to do this on August 1. Yet on the third, he needed to find three more officers for XV Corps' 5th and 7th Armored Divisions and its 28th Infantry Division. Faced with a shortage of experienced candidates at the time, he asked General Quesada for help, and IX TAC immediately supplied the needed officers. A

Maj. Gen. John S. Wood, Commanding General, 4th Armored Division.



SOURCE: Vincent J. Esposito, ed., *West Point Atlas of American Wars*, V. 2, Map 54, (New York: Praeger, 1960)

few days later Weyland returned the favor, providing IX TAC additional air support needed to blunt a dangerous German counteroffensive at Mortain.[12]

Enemy night flying operations presented another challenge. Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey, Third Army chief of staff, approached Weyland on August 3, 1944, with a request for nighttime air cover for the Pontorson Bridge over the Sée River and for dams and roads in the Avranches area to quell nuisance nighttime shelling by the Germans in Northwest Europe. As in North Africa, night combat capability would prove a key weakness of Allied air forces throughout the campaign. Without a night fighter squadron, Weyland could only request that Ninth Air Force provide one as soon as possible. The Ninth responded by assigning one of IX Air Defense Command's two P–61 night fighter squadrons to cover this Third Army area of operations. Later in the campaign, when the *Luftwaffe* threat declined further, the air leaders would assign night fighters directly to the tactical air commands, where they increasingly flew interdiction rather than air defense missions.

Initial air-ground coordination also proved a problem. Several times during the first week of August, crews flying column cover for the 4th Armored Division in the St. Malo area complained that they could not contact the air liaison controller with the division. Officers at XIX TAC traced the problem to an overloaded C-channel, which pilots and the controllers used for all air-ground communications. Lieutenant John J. Burns of the 371st Fighter Group recalled that C-channel, despite being designated as the squadron channel, turned out to be a common channel for all of Ninth Air Force once close air support began in earnest. As a solution to the communications congestion, General Weyland's operations officers designated each of four channels for a specific function. They also encouraged better radio discipline whereby flight leaders would contact the ground station only when nearing the head of the column. Air-ground communications problems in Brittany declined significantly once the command introduced these procedures.[13]

As Patton's forces swept forward, Weyland had to move his headquarters, which involved relocating the advance headquarters' tents, vehicles, and communications and other equipment. On August 2, Third Army moved its forward echelon command post 11 miles north of Avranches, and XIX TAC followed suit the next day. That same morning, Weyland conferred with Ninth Air Force officers about constructing a clutch of airfields for the XIX TAC farther south in the Rennes area where the command could support ground offensives in the direction of Brest or eastward, depending on how events unfolded. General Royce wanted to send in engineers immediately and Weyland had to remind him that the area remained unsecured. The XIX TAC commander always coordinated airfield sites with the Third Army staff, and that evening General Gaffey concurred in the Rennes plan as well as in a proposal to establish a rearming and refueling strip near Avranches. Enemy activity and supply delays, however, prevented the engineers from beginning this work until August 7.

Air Power for Patton's Army

The IX Engineer Command's 2d Engineer Aviation Brigade (Provisional) handled airfield construction and maintenance for Weyland's command.[14] Normally its commander, Col. R. E. Smyser, Jr., would assign one of his aviation battalions to develop a single advanced landing airstrip with a runway 5,000 feet long and 120 feet wide. Understandably, the time required to complete the field depended on the site's initial condition. A new airfield normally took nine or ten days to complete, but the tactical air command's maintenance officers cautioned that the engineers tended to be over-optimistic by two or three days. Although the engineers refurbished former German airstrips that featured sod or concrete runways, Weyland preferred prefabricated bituminous prepared Hessian surfacing[15] for new runways during the good summer weather and Patton's rapid sweep east. A Hessian surface airstrip, which could be finished in about ten days, provided a firm, smooth, relatively dust-free surface and proved usable immediately after a rainstorm.

While the engineers worked on new airfields, the command's supply and maintenance officers located at the rear headquarters arranged through Ninth Air Force's Service Command to prestock these fields with ammunition, fuel, and other supplies. With the short distance from Normandy to the Rennes area, truck transportation and road congestion proved a lesser problem than the one that developed later, when the rapid drive eastward created severe bottlenecks and transport shortages. Normally, XIX TAC engineers considered a field operational after the runway and one taxiway had been completed. At this time, airdrome personnel, the real nomads of Ninth Air Force, arrived to rearm and service the aircraft until the fighter group's ground echelon arrived. Unlike British fighter squadrons, XIX TAC groups had their own maintenance personnel assigned to perform routine aircraft maintenance functions. The services of the command's two airdrome squadrons proved especially valuable for *roulement* operations, whereby a series of advanced landing strips could be used temporarily by squadrons whose home bases often remained far to the rear. This procedure increased the command's mobility, considerably extending the operational flying range of its units.[16]

As the XIX TAC prepared for its move to the Brittany airfields, Patton's forces already had advanced rapidly south and east. By August 5, 1944, XV Corps captured Mayenne, 20 miles east of Fougeres, and pushed on to Laval further south (**Map 5**). Patton's tactical interests lay clearly to the east, in the direction of Germany, not to the west in Brittany, which he had instructed VIII Corps to overrun with a minimum of force. He remained ambivalent about the need to "reduce" the French ports that proved so difficult to assault, yet which earlier seemed so essential as Allied supply bases for the campaign in Northwest Europe.[17]

The two commanders exchanged opposing views on this issue of fortified positions on August 5, when Patton requested aerial attacks on German gunboats that threatened his flank at St. Malo. Weyland declined to send fight-

er-bombers against such targets after learning that on the previous day the 358th Fighter Group had encountered extremely heavy flak from nearby pillbox defenses and ships in the harbor at St. Malo. Patton, perhaps mindful of the "short bombing" at St. Lô during Operation Cobra, did not want to call on heavy bombers, so Weyland requested medium bombers from Ninth Air Force. At the same time, the air force command also provided the night cover over the road south of Avranches that he requested on behalf of Third Army. This became Weyland's method of supporting Third Army operations: he supplied fighter-bombers whenever he believed the request sound, but otherwise he would refuse them and turn to Ninth Air Force for help with medium bombers. While conferring with Ninth Air Force leaders about medium bombers for Third Army, General Weyland received the good news that the 36th Fighter Group, flying P–47s at Brucheville, site A–16, (**Map 4**) had joined his command. Curry's Cougars, a favorite of his and the last of his original XIX TAC units to arrive from England, rapidly became a favorite of Patton's too, as attested by the letters of commendation and numerous references to shipments of Cointreau liqueur to the 36th Fighter Group from Third Army.[18]

Weyland had to have been pleased with the first five days of "Blitz warfare, U.S. style."[19] Despite the problematic nature of bomb damage assessment statistics, his groups tallied an impressive score of interdiction and close support target claims at a cost of only three aircraft lost. Armed reconnaissance and armored column cover missions clearly proved ideally suited for mobile operations, while the air-ground support system eliminated initial communications problems and continued to improve. He also could effectively command his forces and keep pace with Third Army's advance echelon. Planning was underway for his groups to displace forward, and maintenance and supply experienced no difficulty providing support. Although he dealt with many issues through established organizational channels, informal discussions with Patton and his staff often proved highly effective. With the combat situation changing almost hourly, informal decision-making and flexibility became essential to air operations.

As XIX TAC aircraft ranged south of the Loire—far ahead of the Third Army spearheads to the east—and west into Brittany in support of VIII Corps, General Weyland encountered growing command and control difficulties. While Patton needed to remain as close as possible to his advancing columns to oversee operations at the front, Weyland's focus shifted in the opposite direction. His operational capability depended increasingly on the aviation engineers who built new airfields and on the signals experts who provided his communications net. In numerous respects, the air arm became more ground based than were the ground forces. Command and control under these conditions would prove to be Weyland's greatest challenge and one he never completely mastered during the mobile phase of operations.

Army engineers handled airfield construction and maintenance for Weyland's advancing aircraft squadrons, laying steel mesh for emergency landing strips (top), and on occasion broom-massaging the airstrips (bottom).

Aviation engineers used heavy equipment in preparing fields for landing aircraft (top). They were also called upon to repair damage following enemy bombardment: this engineer battalion worked with air hammers on a bomb crater left by a 500-lb. bomb (bottom).

Mechanics hoist a severely damaged P–47 onto a trailer to be stripped of all usable parts (top); only a few miles behind enemy lines (right), these soldier-technicians are refueling, rearming, and checking planes for the next mission.

On a German airfield captured by the Allies, a mechanic checks out a P–51 Mustang.

A crane is used to transfer bombs from storage to be mounted beneath the wing of a P–47 (top); and at a French railroad station, airmen load crated bombs onto trucks destined for Ninth Air Force airstrips (bottom).

Supporting Patton's End Run to the Seine

On the Allied side, General Bradley's decision to allow Patton to operate in Brittany with minimum forces led to a major change in Allied strategy that took advantage of collapsing German positions.[20] In light of Third Army's initial success, on August 4, 1944, Allied ground forces commander General Montgomery, with General Eisenhower's approval, directed the Allied armies to strike east in force to destroy the German Seventh Army west of the Seine. Accordingly, while most of Patton's forces attacked to the east, First Army troops moved toward the road centers of Vire and Mortain while the British would attack toward Argentan, and the Canadians in the direction of Falaise (**Map 5**). The Germans, meanwhile, had not remained indifferent to the growing threat of encirclement. Back on August 2, Hitler directed Field Marshal Guenther von Kluge, his commander in chief in the west, to counterattack the Allies at Mortain with eight of the nine Panzer divisions available in Normandy. By doing so, Hitler hoped the *Wehrmacht* could reach the coast, regain Avranches, isolate Patton's army, and then move north to destroy the beachhead. If successful, the Germans could reestablish the conditions of static warfare that proved so successful during June and July. Von Kluge planned to attack by August 6 or 7.[21]

As Third Army's XV Corps prepared to encircle the German Seventh Army in the Mortain area from the south during the second week of August, XIX TAC assumed other support functions and expanded to its full complement of nine groups. On August 6, Ninth Air Force leaders decided to increase XIX TAC's striking power by dividing the fighter-bomber groups equally between the two tactical air commands. Until then most had been flying under IX TAC control. Ninth Air Force officers informed Weyland that XIX TAC would have operational control of the following nine groups beginning on August 7: the 36th, 373d, 406th, 371st, 405th, 354th, 358th, 362d, and 363d.[22] These comprised the command's original 100th and 303d Fighter Wings, now supplemented by the 371st and 405th P–47 groups. Weyland was particularly pleased to gain the 354th, a crack Mustang fighter group, and the 406th Fighter Group, whose rocket-firing 513th P–47 squadron had performed so effectively against tanks during the St. Lô breakout. At the same time, Weyland sought to simplify command and control procedures by having only one wing, the 303d, control all of these groups until the units moved to new airstrips farther afield.

On the evening of August 7, 1944, Weyland met with General Gaffey and other members of the Third Army staff to discuss the growing threat of a German counterattack, which they expected to occur east of Avranches near Mortain (**Map 5**). The XIX TAC aircrews had been overflying the Avranches bottleneck on return flights since August 2, and were keeping Third Army well

informed of German concentrations developing in the Mortain area. After the meeting on the seventh, Weyland called Quesada, whose IX TAC held primary responsibility for the area threatened, and offered to divert his fighter-bombers to the crisis area at any time, and place them under the control of Quesada's command. Three Panzer divisions did, in fact, attack early the following morning and the IX TAC commander called to accept the offer. He asked only for the 406th's rocket squadron and P–51s for top cover. During the day's fighting, the XIX TAC pilots claimed 18 enemy aircraft shot down and much German ground equipment destroyed.

By August 7, 1944, General Walker's XX Corps units had reached the Loire River and began moving east. The XIX TAC now began its celebrated airborne "watch on the Loire," although it is not clear precisely when Patton requested Weyland's forces to guard his flank or when the air commander responded that he could do so, providing he had good weather. Patton did not worry too much about the exposed southern flank of the Third Army, noting in his diary that "our air can spot any group of enemy large enough to hurt us and I can always pull something out of the hat." Weyland's forces had been flying armed reconnaissance in the Loire region since August 2, and the 12th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron had been doing the same. Once his fighter-bomber groups and the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group moved into the Rennes and Le Mans areas in mid-August, the 10th added to the schedule a daily photo reconnaissance milk run over the Loire by A–20s of the 155th Night Photo Squadron. The watch on the Loire became a fixture on the mission charts well into September as Patton's southern flank grew to nearly 500 miles long—from Brittany in the west to the Mosel River in eastern France.[23]

On August 8, 1944 the Third Army command post moved again, this time to St. James, eight miles northwest of Fougeres (**Map 5**). The principle of collocating headquarters for joint operations continued when Weyland joined Patton the same day. Weyland left the command's B-echelon in place with the fighter control center under Colonel Ferguson at Beauchamps, the previous site above Avranches, until he could be assured of effective communication. He had good reason for concern. The following morning he learned that during the evening the enemy had sabotaged his land lines, normally the most reliable and secure means of communication, in what would become common practice in the days ahead. Wire and signal equipment shortages also contributed to the communication problem. Although Weyland could contact Ferguson by VHF radio, the situation proved far from ideal. The commander of the tactical air command vowed his advance headquarters would never again outrun its landline communications net to its forces. Meanwhile, Colonel Ferguson's small echelon, which had been left behind, maintained contact with the groups and controlled air operations.[24]

For Weyland and his staff, the best solution seemed to be to move the fighter-bomber groups forward to the Rennes area below the fighting at

Avranches and closer to Third Army's front line divisions that most needed air support. Being closer to the front lines would provide less flying time en route and, consequently, more time over target. Furthermore, the weather in Brittany was better because it did not suffer as much from the fog and mist of Normandy that often restricted flying in the mornings. Much of General Weyland's time during the second and third weeks of August involved arrangements for moving to the Rennes sites as quickly as possible. By August 11, the engineers had repaired the concrete runway at Rennes (A–27) and the sod field at a second German site, Gael (A–31) (**Map 4**). The 354th and 362d Fighter Groups and 100th Fighter Wing moved in that day, with the 12th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron due at Rennes the next day. Conditions proved far from ideal at these new airfields. The 354th complained about the rough surface at Gael and Weyland agreed with their assessment when he visited there a few days after the field became operational. He also disapproved of the hordes of civilians on the field and he took steps to alleviate both hazards. With communications now secure, he decided to move the command's B-echelon down to St. James to consolidate operational control at advance headquarters once again. The fighter control center would remain with the 303d Fighter Wing at Beauchamps until it could be brought forward to the Le Mans area.

General Weyland had suggested Le Mans as the next site for forward airfields during a Ninth Air Force commander's conference on August 9. At that meeting he asked for a microwave early warning (referred to as MEW) radar, the new, large, 60-ton ground radar that could track and control intercepts of enemy aircraft and control friendly airplanes out to distances of 200 miles, well beyond the range of conventional forward directional post radar. General Quesada's command obtained one of the five existing MEW radars for use in Normandy ten days after D-Day. Although Ninth Air Force possessed a second radar, it remained in England to assist in defending against the V–1 flying bombs, which the Germans began launching against England on June 13, 1944. Weyland declared that he, too, needed a MEW radar in view of not only the renewed German air threat associated with the Mortain buildup, but also XIX TAC's widening range of reconnaissance missions. A lack of early warning, he argued after suffering the loss of several aircraft, was "costing planes, crews, ground soldiers, and equipment."[25]

Civilian technical experts in the European theater took a contrary position. Radar, they argued, played a rather small role in the battle of France because of the speed of the advance and the good weather. Pilots normally could navigate to their targets even when out of range of fighter control sets, while the sets themselves generally lacked organic transport and were not very sturdy. Although these reasons were doubtless valid, General Weyland, aware how important General Quesada considered the new radar, remained convinced of the requirement. In fact, IX TAC had the only available MEW radar, which it credited with playing a large role in helping its fighters destroy 160

enemy aircraft from D-Day to the beginning of September. General Weyland failed on four different occasions to obtain the MEW radar, but in the third week of September he succeeded. The XIX TAC received a set for its newly formed provisional tactical control group in the Metz area just in time for the Lorraine Campaign.[26]

It is difficult to precisely evaluate XIX TAC's effectiveness during the second week of operations. In terms of statistics, its groups continued to add to their impressive totals of enemy targets destroyed and damaged, while mission and sortie rates set record highs. These became the first of the heady days of Third Army's headlong advance that often averaged 20 miles a day. During the drive, Weyland's airmen flew column cover for the armored spearheads moving east while continuing to support ongoing operations in Brittany, and other patrols roamed well beyond Paris searching out the *Luftwaffe* in the air and the *Wehrmacht* on the ground.

A number of special days stand out in the record-setting operation. On August 7, the *Luftwaffe* appeared in force for the first time since August 1, and according to pilot reports of the ensuing engagements, it lost 33 aircraft. Significantly, the 36th Fighter Group claimed six after the ground controller released its aircraft from covering the XV Corps and vectored them to Chartres airfield following a reconnaissance pilot's report that he spotted enemy aircraft at that site. This type of reconnaissance and fighter-bomber teamwork would continue to improve in the weeks ahead. On another occasion, the 362d Fighter Group demonstrated in missions east of Paris that, contrary to conventional wisdom, strafing with .50-caliber guns proved effective against tanks attacked from the rear (which housed the engine compartment). On August 8, during their third mission of the day, the P–47 pilots attacked seven Panzer tanks, claiming three destroyed and four damaged, before proceeding on to other lucrative targets. Nevertheless, the 362d would have to work much harder to top the 406th Fighter Group's 513th squadron, the Tiger Tamers, which consistently led the command in claims of Nazi armor damaged and destroyed.[27]

Tactical air power demonstrated flexibility in other ways as well. When General Gaffey asked Weyland to see whether the 4th Armored Division, which had moved beyond its HF and FM communications range of headquarters, required help, Weyland obtained the information needed through his air liaison communications net (it was between 20–25 miles from Brest at the time) and notified army headquarters. General Patton also often asked the air arm to check out suspected counterattacks, which Weyland did with alacrity, scrambling or diverting aircraft to the target area. If the threat did not require immediate attention, he responded by sending a reconnaissance plane to have a look, and then followed it with fighter-bombers if necessary. In short, XIX TAC provided Patton an on call, close air supporting service.[28]

General Patton harbored no doubts about the effectiveness of his air support. Characteristically, following a visit from RAF Air Chief Marshal Arthur

Tedder, General Spaatz, and other prominent airmen on August 9, General Weyland recorded in his diary that Patton seemed "well satisfied" with the support of XIX TAC. A less happy aspect of the meeting, however, found these officers expressing renewed interest to Weyland in the seizure of Brest and other Brittany ports in the near future. Patton and Gaffey discussed this prospect with Weyland that evening over drinks. Neither the Third Army leaders nor Weyland were enthused over the prospect of static, siege warfare. The air commander knew that fixed fortifications represented some of the most difficult and dangerous targets for fighter-bombers, and his later evaluations of XIX TAC operations invariably stressed this point. Cherbourg should have been proof enough for those in doubt. On the other hand, tests at the AAF's Proving Ground Command at Eglin Field, Florida, in January and February 1945, demonstrated that fighter-bombers with 1,000-lb. bombs stood the best chance against the hardened defenses of the V–1 and V–2s. In the case of Brest, Spaatz and Tedder clearly reflected the views of General Eisenhower's headquarters, and although expressing reservations, Weyland "agreed to render ourselves [XIX TAC] available." It is likely that Patton later wished he had argued Weyland's case with the senior airmen.[29]

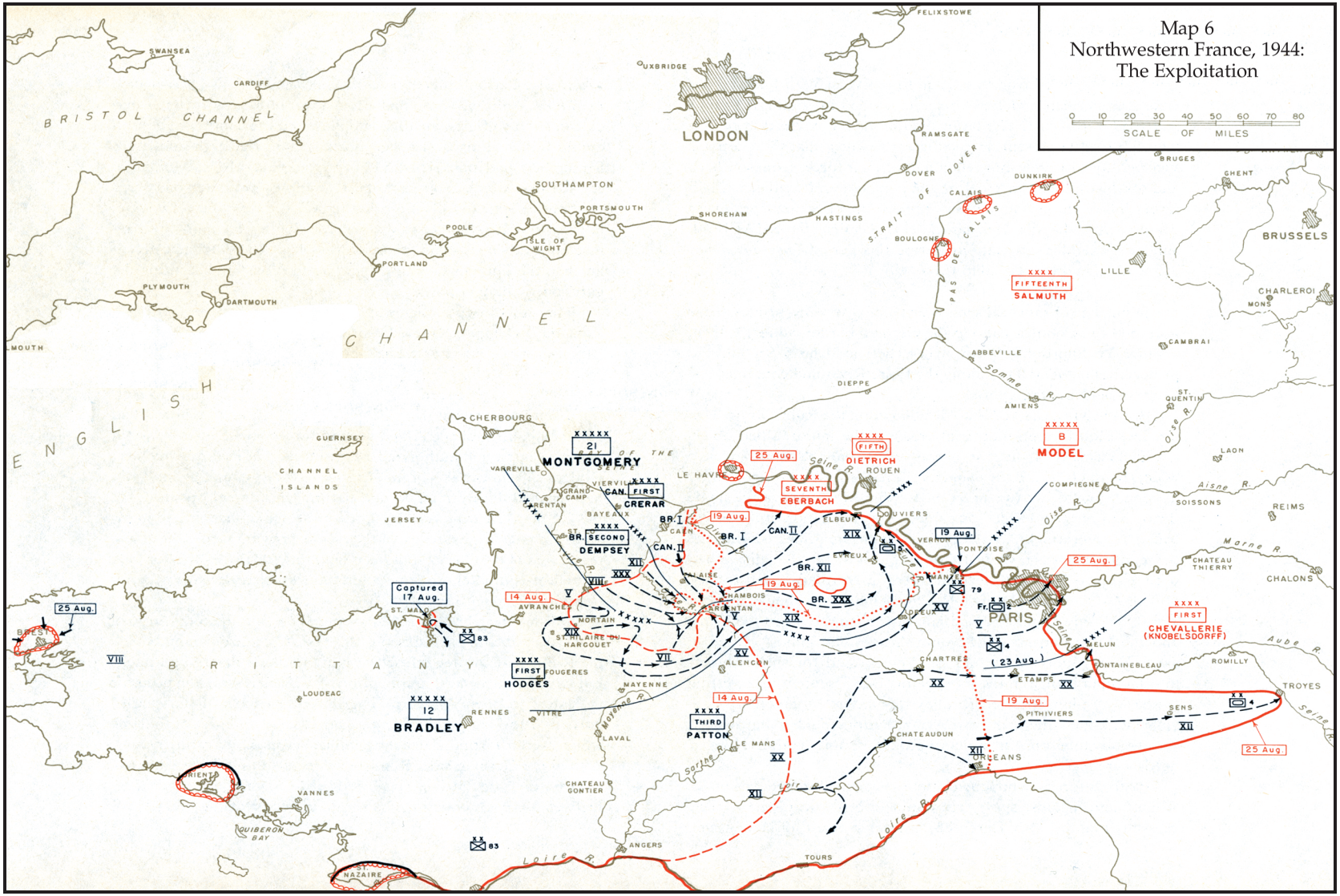
On August 11, 1944, with the encirclement of the German Seventh Army near Argentan well underway from the south, General Patton ordered units of XV Corps to push on toward Falaise after the capture of Argentan. The XIX TAC supported the offensive with 36th and 362d Fighter Groups' P–47s, which provided day-long air coverage of the advancing columns. Both Patton and Weyland looked forward to a crushing victory. At the same time, Weyland's forces continued to support the other, ever-widening Third Army fronts: in the east toward the Seine, in the west in Brittany, and in the south along the Loire.[30]

Between August 12–19, the Third Army and the XIX TAC attempted to close what their historians referred to as the Argentan Trap. On August 8, the day after the German counterattack began, General Bradley proposed that First Army hold at Mortain while units of First and Third Armies moved north to meet advancing Canadian and British forces, thereby preventing a German escape to the Seine. Bradley worried that Patton's force of four divisions might be too weak to halt the German retreat, while a failure to establish a clear meeting between the converging American and Canadian troops could result in confusion and much loss of life. Consequently, in one of the war's most controversial decisions, on August 13, Bradley ordered Patton to halt XV Corps' drive and hold near Argentan. Yet when the Canadian drive stalled at Falaise on August 16, a 15-mile gap remained between the two Allied lines. With the jaws of the trap open until August 20, an estimated 50,000 German troops escaped eastward through the so-called Argentan-Falaise gap. Eventually this force would join 200,000 additional German soldiers west of the Seine and the Allies would be unable to prevent their crossing. Patton, meanwhile, received permission from Bradley to send part of the XV Corps to the Seine in an additional attempt to encircle retreating German forces.[31]

The *Luftwaffe* could do little to assist the pell-mell German retreat. Despite using between 30–40 night fighters and bombers in operations against Allied ground targets, close support of German Seventh Army forces proved nearly nonexistent. By mid-August 1944, German air leaders could muster only 75 single-engine fighters for daily operations on the western front. Although the *Luftwaffe* could still achieve a figure of 250 sorties on August 15, this sortie rate could not be sustained despite reinforcements that allowed for several full-scale efforts of 250–300 sorties per day later in the month. The rapid Allied advance forced the *Luftwaffe* to abandon bases in France for more secure, more distant sites in Belgium. By the end of August, the *Luftwaffe*'s single-engine fighter force in Northwest Europe totaled only 420, 110 of which flew from French bases. Equally alarming, accumulated losses and insufficient training of new pilots after early 1944 resulted in a largely inexperienced force that found itself generally outmatched by Allied aviators. Pilots for XIX TAC reported the *Luftwaffe* now preferred to attack only when it clearly outnumbered its opponent, but the inexperience of the *Luftwaffe* pilots still gave the Allies the upper hand.[32]

With Allied troops holding the shoulders of, and causing severe losses within, the Mortain-Falaise-Argentan pocket, tactical air had good hunting as the Germans felt compelled to clog the roads even in daylight in their desperate attempt to flee. For XIX TAC pilots, though, the opportunity proved less rewarding than they desired. The Ninth Air Force had established boundaries that focused Weyland's forces on protecting Patton's right flank, where they could "blast away at armored columns east and south of Paris." One can appreciate the dismay of Curry's Cougars, who watched other Ninth Air Force units line up for what became known as harvest time in Argentan on August 17.[33]

Weyland, meanwhile, faced a major crisis in joint operations. The dilemma first appeared on August 11 when General Gaffey, Third Army chief of staff, recommended moving the two command posts forward to Le Mans. Weyland quickly rejected the idea because the site farther east would not be situated along the north-south communications axis of 100th Fighter Wing or near the proposed location of the 303d Fighter Group (**Map 5**). If Third Army moved directly to Le Mans, he said, XIX TAC would have to operate there with a liaison detachment. He suggested Laval as the next location instead. Both air and ground advance headquarters moved to Laval the following day, on August 12, with Weyland finally directing Colonel Ferguson's B-echelon to deploy to St. James. So far so good. Then, given the rapid pace of his sweep to the east, Patton announced that Third Army's forward echelon had to move to the Le Mans area on the fourteenth. The army commander had little choice. Spearheads by XII Corps had already reached Orleans, while XV Corps arrived earlier at Argentan, and then sent several units toward the Seine. Meanwhile, XX Corps was moving rapidly toward Chartres. In the west, VIII Corps continued to struggle against the Brittany ports while keeping a modest ground watch on the Loire (**Map 6**).

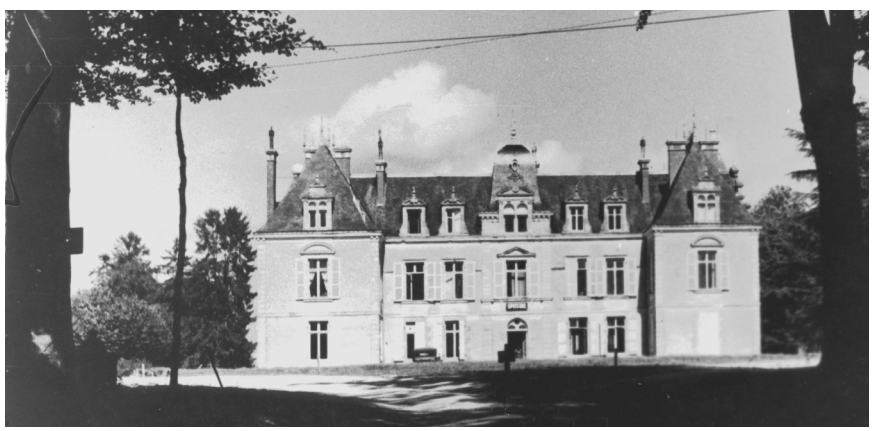


SOURCE: Vincent J. Esposito, ed., *West Point Atlas of American Wars*, V. 2, Map 55, (New York: Praeger, 1960)

Weyland explained that he could not join Patton immediately in Le Mans and still retain effective control of his forces. The Army commander agreed that XIX TAC's advance headquarters should not move without adequate communications for command and control. Weyland's makeshift solution was to move deputy chief of staff Colonel Thompson, another officer, and a small signals unit to the Third Army's command post as the air command's so-called X-Ray detachment.[34] This plan called for Thompson's unit to link the two headquarters through a single cable that had been rushed forward, while retaining the air liaison party VHF radio net as backup. The X-Ray detachment performed a liaison function only; control of operations remained with General Weyland at the forward echelon in Laval. The headquarters B-echelon, which controlled the fighters, also would move to Laval from St. James as soon as effective communications could be established. Now XIX TAC had four separated headquarters elements—rear headquarters at Nehou and three advance headquarters echelons at St. James, Laval, and Le Mans—an example of tactical air's flexibility in Europe. Contrary to the emphasis on centralization called for in air force doctrine, highly mobile operations demanded ever greater decentralized control of the supporting air resources.

To accommodate this decentralization, the Third Army staff split its air operations section into two echelons as well.[35] The army's air operations officer and the administrative echelon remained with Patton's forward command post. There, the air operations officer posted the daily air situation for General Patton, coordinated missions for army support, and kept the ground echelon that remained located at XIX TAC's combat operations center apprised of General Patton's wishes and intentions. For his part, Colonel Thompson kept General Weyland informed of the army's intent. Even so, Weyland normally

The Chateau near Laval that served as the command post for Weyland's rear headquarters.



flew from Laval to Patton's command post in Le Mans every other day to confer personally with Third Army's staff. The decentralized system eventually functioned reasonably well, but at the start it faced major problems.

With decentralization there is always a tendency among the components, in the friction of war, to act independently. Effective command and control in these circumstances become more difficult to ensure. General Weyland immediately confronted this challenge. It is not entirely clear whether Third Army's air intelligence and operations officers at Le Mans bypassed only Weyland at Laval, or how much coordination they carried out with Colonel Ferguson at Bechelon's location in issuing orders to air units, but in Weyland's view they misused the system. This struck at the core of AAF doctrine on control of air power and General Patton's agreement with his air commander. Two days after moving to Le Mans, on August 16, Weyland visited Third Army headquarters and met with assistant chief of staff Maj. Gen. H. R. Gay (Patton and Gaffey were away at the time) and the Army air intelligence and operations officers. Afterward, he reflected, we "straightened out the confusion" of Army intelligence (G–2, Air) and Army operations (G–3, Air) officers who had been "laying on missions direct." Weyland clearly felt compelled to make his highly decentralized air command and control system function effectively—under the air commander's direction.[36]

By August 16, 1944, elements of the Third Army reached the Seine, and spearheads had moved within nine miles of Paris's western suburbs. The front lines now stretched 100 miles from Weyland's Laval headquarters and even farther from his fighter-bomber bases. This meant that Colonel Smyser's engineer battalions already needed to prepare sites in the Le Mans area before they had finished those in the Brittany group. Two days earlier, on August 14, Weyland had met with General Vandenberg and his deputy, Brig. Gen. Richard E. Nugent, regarding the next airfield cluster needed by the command. The generals agreed that construction on the first of four Le Mans fields would begin the next day. Weyland met with his staff on the fifteenth to arrange for the new deployment. They decided that the 100th Fighter Wing should handle the forward airdromes at Le Mans, while the 303d Fighter Group would operate those in the rear area at Rennes. The forward direction post radar system would be located at Rennes for flying control. The command's operations officer, Colonel Ferguson, would manage the move. Everything now waited on the progress of the engineers.[37]

The following evening, General Weyland attended his first XIX TAC joint operations briefing and first combined operations conference in several days. In fact, it is doubtful whether he found time in the days before separating his advance headquarters into two and then three echelons to be present at these evening briefings, since he normally met with General Patton and his staff on fast-breaking events during the evening hours. From mid-August forward, however, Weyland routinely attended the XIX TAC evening planning briefing.

Col. Russell A. Berg, commander, 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group.

After the evening meeting on August 16, Weyland conferred with Col. Russell A. Berg, recently designated commander of the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group. The XIX TAC had just gained this group, which would provide much needed visual and photographic data for the air-ground team. Its arrival represented an additional challenge to his aviation engineers in their constant effort to find the optimum operational locations for command units. Weyland wanted to locate Berg's group, most of which was then only en route from England, at Chateaudun, the big German base approximately 150 miles east of Rennes. However, because the engineers did not expect it to be fully operational until August 27, the 10th's squadrons would use the Rennes airfield in the interim. The 155th Night Photo Squadron, flying F–3 (A–20) aircraft, arrived to join the 12th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron on the eleventh, followed by the second F–6 (P–51) unit, the 15th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, on the twelfth. By August 15, the group reached full-strength with the addition of the 31st and 34th Tactical Photo Squadrons, which flew F–5 (P–38) reconnaissance aircraft.[38]

In addition to making Chateaudun the focus of the command's reconnaissance effort—at least until the command moved forward again—General Weyland viewed that base as the major *roulement* site for the entire area. Chateaudun could provide short-term support and serve as a staging base to increase the range of the fighter-bombers. The importance of reconnaissance had risen dramatically since the Normandy Campaign, and the Chateaudun location would enable the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group to make a major contribution on all fronts. Reconnaissance data reported by pilots and acquired through photography became the primary source of intelligence for command operations during the summer of intense mobility. Although the fighter control center provided the tactical air command headquarters radio intercept, or Y,

information from the 3d Radio Squadron (Mobile), Detachment C, the records are sketchy on its value before the Ardennes Campaign. Nevertheless, Weyland realized the importance of his radio intercept source of intelligence on enemy air movements and refused to release his Y-service to the new XXIX TAC when the latter became operational in September 1944.[39]

Meanwhile, on August 16, the Third Army steamroller overran Chateaudun, Dreux, Chartres, and Orleans; it reached the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt and Vernon northwest of Paris three days later. The XIX TAC continued to find good targets in the area of German retreat. The 36th Fighter Group, in fact, had its biggest day of the month here on August 13 when it claimed the destruction of 400–500 vehicles west of Argentan. Allied officials estimated that, of the nearly 14,000 German vehicles lost in the retreat from Falaise, air attacks accounted for 60 to 80 percent.[40]

The command also dealt with what appeared to be a resurgent *Luftwaffe*. Once redeployed from its Paris airfields, the *Luftwaffe* attempted to protect German ground forces moving toward the Seine. On August 15 and 16, the *Luftwaffe* lost 26 fighter aircraft in action near Dreux against the 354th's Mustangs and P–47s of the 373d and 362d Fighter Groups. Perhaps it was fitting that the 36th Fighter Group, which had been deprived of participation in the lucrative Mortain corridor attacks, played a key role in the final act to the west when the first of the fortified ports in Brittany fell on the seventeenth. Curry's Cougars circled the St. Malo fortress area until the Germans accepted the surrender ultimatum that day.[41]

The Allies now turned their attention to the Seine River. As early as August 13, Weyland had requested information from the Third Army chief of staff concerning likely German crossing points on which his pilots could focus. Third Army's intelligence assessment concluded that the Germans would attempt to hold open the corridor to the Seine. Could the U.S. First and Third Armies arrive in force and in time to prevent the Germans from escaping across the river?

From the Seine to the Meuse

Third Army's XV Corps secured a bridgehead over the Seine at Mantes-Gassicourt on August 19, with orders to follow the left bank to Elbeuf and Vernon and cut off the enemy's escape route. On its right, XX and XII Corps moved rapidly toward Fontainebleau and Sens, respectively. Meanwhile, VIII Corps prepared to launch an offensive against the remaining German-held Breton ports by the twenty-fifth (**Map 6**). With First and Third Army troops continuing to pull up to the Seine on August 20, General Eisenhower earlier decided to abandon the original limits set for the lodgement area. Instead of waiting to build up the logistic base, American forces would cross the Seine in

force and relentlessly pursue the disintegrating German army and prevent it from regrouping at the German border. At the same time, the Supreme Allied Commander rejected General Montgomery's proposal on August 23, for a "single front" approach in the north, one in which the British general would direct a methodical advance through Belgium and on into the Ruhr. In its place, Eisenhower adopted the so-called broad-front strategy that permitted a second advance led by Patton's Third Army farther south toward the Saar. To temper Montgomery's disappointment, he added Hodges's First Army to Montgomery's northern advance—*and* accorded it priority for gasoline deliveries over Patton's swiftly moving forces.[42]

General Eisenhower based his decision to continue pursuing the Germans across the Seine partly on the spectacular success of Operation Anvil (also called Operation Dragoon), the amphibious invasion of southern France. On August 15, 1944, three divisions of U.S. VI Corps and an attached French armored force under the command of Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch's U.S. Seventh Army landed on the south coast of France between Cannes and Toulon. Seventh Army's objective involved freeing the port of Marseilles for Allied supply and protecting Eisenhower's southern flank farther north. While French troops invested the ports of Toulon and Marseilles, American divisions, soon aided significantly by French resistance forces, quickly fanned out in hot pursuit of German troops fleeing north through the Rhone River valley and into the foothills of the French Alps. This rapid Allied drive threatened to eliminate German forces in southern France and, by linking with Allied forces in northern France, block German troops in their headlong retreat from reaching the safety of the German border.[43]

As Allied forces attempted to envelop German forces at the Seine River, XIX TAC continued to provide column cover and armed reconnaissance support over all of the Third Army's expanding fronts. Yet Weyland's fighter-bombers were now spread dangerously thin in the east and south, which meant increased flying distances and less time to loiter. Moreover, the weather turned sour on August 19, and air operations in the Seine region became severely restricted. The command could fly only 16 missions on the nineteenth, a more respectable 36 on August 20, but none on the twenty-first. This came at a particularly inopportune time because the Allies, rejoicing that the Argentan pocket at last had been closed on August 20, also knew that the Germans had been sighted crossing the Vernon Bridge over the Seine that same day. Again, Ninth Air Force's weak night fighter force limited its ability to interdict growing and extensive German nighttime movements. In spite of the rain and low ceilings, XIX TAC's fighter-bombers did what they could by dropping delayed-fuze bombs at ferry slips.[44]

Some critics contend that Patton and his Third Army could have prevented the escape of the German Seventh Army across the Seine. If, as the argument runs, Third Army had not been so dedicated to headlong pursuit to

the German border and instead elected to confront the enemy directly in what amounted to frontal assault, it could have destroyed the retreating German forces, possibly leading to a German surrender all along the line well before Christmas 1944. To be sure, on August 23, General Patton directed his staff to prepare two plans, one for pushing eastward below Paris with all due speed, and another, Plan A, calling for just such a move—a sudden swing north of the city to Beauvais to entrap the Germans and, in Patton's view, indeed bring the war to a swift end. Yet, the latter operation meant moving Third Army forces across the boundaries of the British and Canadian armies, interfering with the other Allied commands, and threatening General Eisenhower's broad-front strategy. This strategy called for all of the Allied armies to advance abreast against the retreating Germans, to share equally in the eventual victory. Submitted for approval, Eisenhower rejected Patton's Plan A the next day, the twenty-fourth.[45]

At the Seine, tactical air power, too, played a less than decisive role. Only a massive, concentrated air assault on the German forces there might have made a difference, but XIX TAC planners apparently never contemplated this in view of competing priorities, worsening weather, and perhaps the command's preoccupation with getting the Le Mans airfields ready. Still, postwar AAF evaluators of these close air support tactical air operations concluded: "Allied air forces, with more night reconnaissance and night air attacks, could have effectively prevented most of [the German equipment] from crossing [the Seine]."[46]

Before Eisenhower disapproved Patton's Plan A, on August 22 Generals Weyland and Patton met at 12th Army Group headquarters, where they reviewed the probable course of future operations. With leading elements of the Third Army moving forward rapidly against Melun, Louviers, and Troyes, they anticipated the highly mobile campaign would soon move beyond Paris to the German border. Weyland worried that Patton might not understand the range limitations that his fighter-bombers faced when called on to operate far to the east of their soon-to-be completed bases at Le Mans.[47] Even with *roulement* operations underway at Chateaudun, the great distances involved would limit the P–47s' effectiveness in supporting operations in eastern France. With a full bomb load and a 150-gallon belly tank, the Thunderbolt possessed a combat radius of approximately 350 miles. Yet, the distance from Chateaudun to Metz totaled nearly 300 miles, which meant precious little time for operations in the target area. The P–51, with bombs and an external fuel tank, however, had a combat radius of 600 miles, which made it the obvious choice for extended fighter sweeps and area patrols in eastern France and Germany.

The prospect of conducting extended operations over greater distances also meant that the command faced problems of increased strain on pilots, aircraft, and support agencies. As Weyland told Patton, XIX TAC confronted major difficulties supporting a continued advance without more advanced

fighter bases, adequate supplies, and established communication. Even before his groups moved to the Le Mans bases, Weyland was looking eastward for potential airfields. Paradoxically, the extraordinary success of mobile air-ground operations now imperiled effective air-ground cooperation!

In the Paris region, Weyland responded to a variety of Third Army requests. The *Luftwaffe* took advantage of the bad weather on August 21–22 to attack the 79th Infantry Division's bridgehead across the Seine northwest of Mantes-Gassicourt. Responding to the Third Army chief of staff's request for help, General Weyland promised to triple air coverage in that area. The twenty-second proved to be a particularly good day for the command; its fighters claimed to have destroyed 20 enemy aircraft while losing only one of its own. In response to the increased threat from German fighters, P–47 crews preferred to leave the high-explosive bombs behind and rely on rockets (for the 406th Fighter Group) and strafing while on column cover assignments. Armed reconnaissance and armored column cover, meanwhile, continued to comprise the majority of missions during this period, highlighted by the air support of 4th Armored Division's Combat Command A, 12 miles east of Sens on August 23. In this instance, 362d P–47s, after flying armed reconnaissance ahead of the column, returned to disperse Bf 109s that earlier had strafed the ground troops. The *Luftwaffe* also continued to challenge XIX TAC in the forward area, while the two P–51 groups had success on area patrols east of Paris near Reims.[48]

With the arrival of General Charles de Gaulle's French forces, the liberation of Paris began on August 24. Third Army continued its major thrust east in the direction of Metz and Nancy, and its staff worried increasingly about its diminishing supply stocks. In the West, as VIII Corps prepared to attack Brest the next day, the protection of its southern flank remained the task of XIX TAC. In spite of bad weather, the command flew 12 missions on the twenty-fourth, including the 371st Fighter Group's armed reconnaissance flights between Tours and Orleans, flights that became known as "working on the railroad." The group claimed more than 200 rail and road vehicles destroyed or damaged from German forces retreating northward from U.S. Seventh Army troops. This, however, served only as a prelude to the eventful interdiction missions of early September.[49]

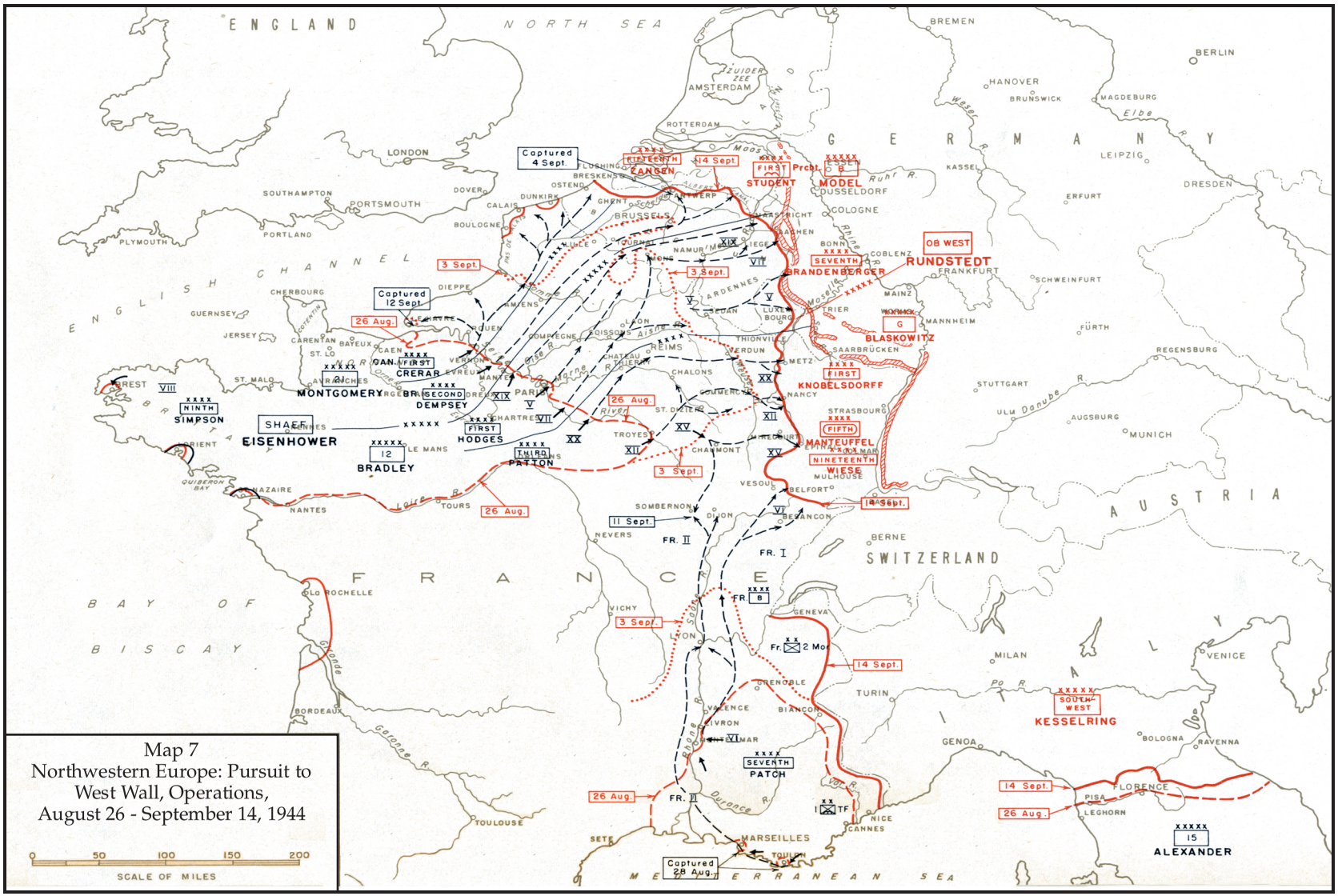
General Weyland remained busy with the Le Mans airfield program. He informed his staff on August 23 that the Chateaudun field was nearly ready for initial *roulement* flying, even though the airfields around Le Mans would not be fully operational for another four or five days. He requested that Ninth Air Force station a night fighter squadron there with his 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group, but the initial priority centered on *roulement* operations, in which he planned to turn around six fighter-bomber squadrons a day at Chateaudun. Perhaps Third Army would receive the support it needed farther east after all.

During the final week in August, both Third Army and XIX TAC leaders had reason to be optimistic. On August 25 Patton's forces enlarged bridge-

heads across the Seine, while armored spearheads drove east. Units of XII and XX Corps approached Chalons, while the XX Corps reached Melun and the XII Corps captured Troyes. In the increasingly distant west, VIII Corps as promised, launched its long-awaited assault against the isolated Breton ports on August 25 (**Map 7**). Only the persistent shortage of gas and ammunition, and increased maintenance requirements for armor, clouded expectations of continued Third Army success. Near month's end, the 12th Army Group issued orders that called for Third Army to proceed to the Rhine and secure bridgeheads from Mannheim to Coblenz.[50]

On August 25, XIX TAC played a major role in ending the German fighter threat in France. Once again the pioneer 354th Mustang group led the way with claims of 49 enemy aircraft destroyed in a series of fighter sweeps north and east of Paris. Among those 49 was the record-setting 500th enemy aircraft shot down by the group since it arrived in the theater in late 1943. That day, Ninth Air Force forces counted 127 German aircraft claimed destroyed and 30 more damaged, at a cost of 27 U.S. aircraft. During the aerial fighting, American pilots observed Bf 109s dropping belly tanks, suggesting that the enemy had begun flying from Belgium and the homeland as Third Army approached the last network of German airfields remaining in eastern France. American pilots also observed increasingly inexperienced foes, who all too frequently made the fatal mistake of trying to turn with the agile P–51 in pursuit. After the shoot-out on August 25, German tactical air forces posed little threat to Third Army's advance.[51]

The next day Weyland initiated *roulement* operations at Chateaudun for squadrons of the 36th and 405th Fighter Groups assigned to fly close air support missions at Melun and Troyes. However, Weyland and his staff remained well aware of the need for air bases east of Paris. The day after Chateaudun opened for business, Weyland met with Ninth Air Force officers to plan the construction and distribution of new sites as much as 50 miles east of the French capital. Fifty miles represented the typical jump forward for the command. Once again, Weyland focused on establishing a *roulement* staging base as soon as Third Army could secure the area. Meanwhile, his intelligence officer, Colonel Hallett, drew up a rail interdiction plan to cut off the main escape route for German troops trapped south of the Loire.[52] On August 26, Third Army's staff enthusiastically endorsed the plan, and Weyland started the operation the following day by sending the 371st Group south, where it destroyed more than 200 enemy vehicles. The key question about the rail-cutting program would be whether the command could devote sufficient air power to the task in view of its other commitments. Reports from Brittany, where the 358th and 362d flew daily area patrols and furnished ground support, indicated the Allied siege of the Atlantic ports was progressing slowly. Ground forces there might require a larger commitment from the tactical air forces. Yet, the weather also threatened to weaken the effort when a cold front moved in from the



SOURCE: Vincent J. Esposito, ed., *West Point Atlas of American Wars*, V. 2, Map 56, (New York: Praeger, 1960)

Atlantic on August 28 and restricted operations for the remainder of the month.

In spite of bad weather on August 28, XIX TAC managed to fly its usual complement of fighter sweeps and close air support operations in the east and in Brittany. It also sent the 406th Fighter Group south of the Loire, where it had a good day against enemy air, claiming 14 aircraft destroyed. The next day, however, operations ceased entirely because of bad weather throughout northern France. Bad weather persisted on the thirtieth, when only two weather reconnaissance flights could be launched. Meanwhile, on August 29, XIX TAC moved its advance headquarters from Laval to the Foret de Marchenoir between Orleans and Chartres (**Map 7**). The command historian enthused that with this move "control of operations shifted far eastward."[53] Certainly a move of 100 miles proved necessary and helpful, but at month's end Weyland, ever the "fireman," had to spend most of his time in the East visiting potential sites for the next move forward. To increase support to the Third Army, he was determined to get *roulement* operations started at a Reims airfield immediately.

On August 28, 1944, Third Army crossed the Marne alongside First Army on a 90-mile front (**Map 7**), but its supply stocks were almost gone. Patton's staff described current supply levels of petroleum as alarming. No gasoline had been received that afternoon, and delivery was 100,000 gallons short of operating requirements. Moreover, logistics officers expected little improvement because General Bradley, 12th Army Group commander, adhered to Eisenhower's dictum and gave supply priority to the First Army. To keep up, Third Army enhanced its already notorious reputation for appropriating available fuel stocks and other supplies wherever it found them. Meanwhile, C–47s of the Ninth Air Force's IX Troop Carrier Command augmented the severely taxed Allied overland system by flying supplies to Beille and other airstrips near Le Mans, beginning on August 19 and continuing for the rest of the month. Although most of these C–47 deliveries ended up with Third Army, with priorities set otherwise, Patton's supply problems worsened.[54] The XIX TAC did not suffer from the fuel constraints experienced by Third Army. Although consumption of aviation gasoline and oil increased significantly following the Cobra breakout, the pipeline from Cherbourg and repaired railroad tracks and equipment provided the airfields with bulk fuel from sizeable accumulated stocks (with 2 million gallons in reserve). Where bottlenecks occurred or the pipeline and rail network could not keep pace with the swift advance, XIX TAC relied on deliveries by truck or C–47 aircraft.[55]

Even short of supplies, Patton's forces continued their relentless advance, now within 100 miles of the German border. On August 30, his intelligence section warned that the Germans would stand at the city of Metz to enable defenders to reinforce the Siegfried Line. Clearly the army needed to reach the Mosel River and pierce the German line of fortifications before the

defense could entrench itself. Yet, it seemed as if the fates had combined to thwart Patton at the climactic moment of the campaign. On the thirtieth, he was told that Third Army would receive no further gasoline shipments at all until September 3. Bad weather and competing tactical air priorities also conspired to restrict armor operations.[56]

By the end of its first month of combat, Third Army had crossed the Meuse and swept past Chalons, over the American battlefields of the First World War (**Map 7**). Moving well ahead of initial schedules, Patton's forces had conducted widely dispersed mobile operations in France that left "uncovered" a southern flank nearly 500 miles long. Yet, the pace slowed as the army outdistanced its supply system. In fact, by August 31, XX Corps captured Verdun, but its Sherman tanks had no more gas. Generals Patton and Weyland nevertheless remained confident that Third Army and XIX TAC would win the race against time and break into Germany itself. After all, as one Third Army staff officer asserted, they had only one more river—the Mosel—to cross.[57]

For General Weyland and members of XIX TAC, the great drive across France in August 1944 would remain the high point of the command's service in Europe. The very next month, an account of its first month's exploits entitled *Twelve Thousand Fighter-Bomber Sorties* received wide distribution in Washington military circles. The command also made available an unclassified version for the public.[58] Although the end of mobile warfare had not yet arrived, September would indeed bring a change in the nature of the fighting in eastern France. At the end of August, however, the participants could not yet foresee this change. With the promise of more supplies at month's end, Third Army was poised to launch a major assault against the Mosel River defenses, while the XIX TAC prepared to concentrate its forces in the East in support of this army offensive.

Protecting Patton's Southern Flank

Historians debate the effect of operating responsibilities in the Loire and Brittany in September on XIX TAC's ability to provide close air support for Patton's offensive on the Mosel. In the East, was Third Army denied the concentrated air support it required? Attention had focused on fuel and ammunition shortages, but did a shortage of aerial support also contribute to the halting of Patton's forces?

At the beginning of September 1944, XIX TAC's mission embraced air support responsibilities on three fronts: in eastern France it flew armed reconnaissance and column cover missions in support of Third Army's drive toward Metz; along the Loire River it kept watch on Patton's flank and flew interdiction sorties against German forces retreating from southern France; and, lastly, in Brittany it played the key tactical air role in the sieges of the Breton for-

tified port facilities. It operated air bases from Brittany to the Le Mans area. As it prepared to move forward again, General Weyland's strike force consisted of the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group and two wings of four fighter-bomber groups each. Only the 363d Fighter Group, the second P–51 group, no longer appeared in the command's original nine-group lineup of August 7. Given the *Luftwaffe's* inability to contest air superiority, the 363d had been redesignated at the start of the month as the 363d Tactical Reconnaissance Group and was being reequipped with F–6 aircraft for reassignment to the soon-to-be established XXIX TAC.[59]

Among the three fronts, in terms of operational commitments, the Loire front proved to be the least burdensome for the command. Weyland dispatched daily reconnaissance flights and armed reconnaissance missions south of the river when good targets could be found. To support his intelligence officer's interdiction plan, he also scheduled a daily rail-cutting mission in the Dijon-Belfort region, the point of exit for German troops retreating from southern France. Often his air groups attacked targets of opportunity on these missions and rearmed and refueled at one of the *roulement* staging bases, thence to fly "on cooperation" with the ground forces for the remainder of the day. Although the southern flank did not become a major combat front for the army in September, it remained important because of the potential threat from German forces remaining in the south. Patton garrisoned the north bank of the Loire River thinly with elements from VIII Corps and relied entirely on his air arm to alert him to and blunt any tactical threats from the Germans in this quarter. The air arm, in turn, greatly benefited from Ultra intelligence on German locations and movements south of the Loire. From the beginning, the "watch on the Loire" became largely an air force show, and it marked a historic milestone for tactical air power.[60]

September opened with a major victory for XIX TAC pilots flying south of the Loire. The rapid drive of Third Army beyond the Meuse and the advance of General Patch's Seventh Army northward from the Mediterranean precipitated a general German retreat up the Rhone valley toward the Belfort escape hatch. As a result, command pilots on armed reconnaissance and fighter sweep missions in the Nancy and Bourges regions found numerous choice targets in the *Wehrmacht* traffic jam. On September 1 the command tallied the largest interdiction mission score of the entire campaign in France when its aircrews claimed more than 800 motor vehicles destroyed or damaged. Curry's Cougars led the way with claims of 311 motor transport and 94 armored vehicles knocked out, and an ammunition dump set ablaze for good measure.[61]

The XIX TAC kept up the pressure on harassed German troops with its modest surveillance and armed reconnaissance force. The effort paid dividends early in the afternoon of September 7, when one of the 155th Night Photo Squadron's F–3s flying the Loire spotted a long enemy vehicle column near Chateauroux on its way toward the Belfort Gap (**Map 7**).[62] The 155th

Ultra operatives busily intercepted communications of the German troops who used Enigma machines such as this to encode their transmissions.

pilot radioed in his sighting and the 406th Fighter Group arrived shortly thereafter. Once it expended all of its ordnance and ammunition, the group left to reload, leaving vehicles overturned and burning. Then the 406th aircraft returned again to complete the destruction of the column. Final claims totaled 132 motor transport and 310 horse-drawn vehicles destroyed. This mission served as the most outstanding example of reconnaissance-fighter-bomber coordination that, by September, had developed into a routine but very effective system.[63]

On September 9, 1944, information reached Army authorities that *Wehrmacht* elements remaining in the area south of the Loire would likely surrender with a gentle nudge, and U.S. Ninth Army commander Lt. Gen. William H. Simpson and Maj. Gen. Robert C. Macon, commander of the 83d Infantry Division, assumed this responsibility after Third Army had declined it. That evening Simpson visited General Weyland at XIX TAC headquarters and outlined his plans to force a surrender, plans in which the XIX TAC figured prominently. Weyland's forces would fly reconnaissance overhead, along the route of the Germans' march to the Loire River, but would not interfere with their movement. If the enemy troops refused the surrender terms offered,

Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery with Lt. Gens. Omar Bradley and William H. Simpson.

Some of the 20,000 German prisoners who were surrendered to General Macon, commander of the 83d Infantry Division, and General Weyland, XIX TAC, on September 16, 1944, in a formal surrender at Beaugency Bridge. The surrender was forced largely by the campaign of isolation by XIX TAC fighter-bombers.

however, then the fighter-bombers would return to attack them. Two days later, on the eleventh, Weyland learned that the German commander of this hastily assembled composite force, Maj. Gen. Botho Elster, had agreed to the terms and marched his troops under U.S. Army escort through country controlled by the French Resistance to the Loire River and a formal *Wehrmacht* surrender at the Beaugency Bridge.[64]

General Simpson called Weyland on September 16 and generously invited him to attend the surrender ceremony at 1500 hours local time. It proved to be a busy day for the XIX TAC commander. He arrived at Chalons to join Generals Simpson and Macon at the Beaugency Bridge on schedule and was pleased to hear that the XIX TAC's aerial presence overhead received primary credit for compelling the surrender. Never before had an air commander been present or received such laurels when one ground unit surrendered to another. On his return to Chalons, Weyland received a call from General Vandenberg asking for information and requesting his presence that evening at Ninth Air Force headquarters in Versailles. Once again the XIX TAC commander took to the air, this time flying westward for dinner with Vandenberg and his deputy, General Nugent. At a press conference, Weyland described the role his command had played in convincing the German troops to surrender.[65]

The command's own analysis of the Loire victory acknowledged that the Germans' flight south of the Loire did not result exclusively from the aerial interdiction missions on September 1 and 7, or from Colonel Hallett's rail-cut-

ting program which forced the *Wehrmacht* onto the highways where it became even more vulnerable. Equally important, on September 11, the U.S. Third and Seventh Armies linked up, blocking the Belfort exit to Germany and trapping these forces. Constant harassment from the French underground also took its toll on the German troops. Tactical air power, nevertheless, contributed an important element in forcing the surrender, if it was not a sufficient cause in its own right. For the first time air forces not only had secured an army's flank, but aerial pressure and the threat of renewed aerial attack led directly to the surrender of the enemy ground force. *Wehrmacht* General Elster made that abundantly clear afterward. The persistent fighter-bomber attacks, he said, had been the key factor in the decision to surrender his 20,000-man *marschgruppe*. The XIX TAC mission of guarding Third Army's flank and contributing to the ultimate surrender of opposing ground forces has been lauded as an unprecedented example of tactical air power's flexibility and diversity.[66]

A Decision in Brittany

In spite of XIX TAC's unprecedented achievement on the Loire front, General Weyland remained convinced that the diversion of his command's assets in Brittany during this period precluded even greater successes. "The fruits of the program of interdiction and harassment," he said, "would have been considerably larger had it not been interrupted by concentration of the fighter-bomber effort at Brest."[67] Indeed, the command's major focus in early September centered not on the Loire or Meuse fronts, but on Brittany where the fortress city of Brest, after many weeks, still represented a major "potential" port for Allied supplies. Whatever its potential, by this time Brest clearly had become a secondary Allied objective 300 miles from the main front. Under the command of an experienced General Middleton, VIII Corps had made little progress since opening its siege offensive back on August 25. Initially, Middleton simply had been allocated insufficient forces and ammunition to succeed against the 30,000 determined defenders—almost twice the number estimated—who remained well protected within an elaborate defensive complex that included concrete pillboxes, casements, gun emplacements, and a host of additional obstacles. After VIII Corps failed to capture the garrison by September 1, the planned completion date of the siege, military officials decided that more effort would need to be devoted to the embarrassing problem.[68]

On September 2, 1944, General Vandenberg notified the XIX TAC commander that Allied leaders had identified Brest and the other Breton fortified sites still holding out as an urgent priority. These sites would be attacked by all available bombers and fighter-bombers. Weyland, Vandenberg continued, had been named operational commander for the tactical air effort, an effort that would include not only every fighter-bomber group in his command, but oth-

ers from General Quesada's IX TAC as well. General Vandenberg directed Weyland to coordinate the Brittany air effort with General Middleton, the VIII Corps commander. Earlier, Middleton had criticized what he considered subpar air support from the XIX TAC. Yet, when Weyland raised the issue with Patton the corps commander denied it, and nothing more came of the incident. Weyland could have anticipated support from Patton. The Third Army commander judged Middleton at this time to be a complainer and procrastinator who, like Montgomery, required more of everything before beginning an assault. In fairness to Middleton, his assessment of the tactical difficulties at Brest proved accurate, and later Patton would come to consider this most capable infantry leader among his best corps commanders. In any event, in early September, Middleton had all the air power he needed, or so it appeared. When Weyland contacted the VIII Corps after Vandenberg's call on the evening of September 2, however, he learned that American ground forces could not follow up immediate fighter-bomber attacks because insufficient supplies of ammunition made it impossible to mount coordinated air-ground attacks.[69]

The Ninth Air Force operations order for September 3, 1944, nonetheless, called for an "all out attack" which, as it turned out, totaled 24 of the 34 missions and nearly 300 of the 500 sorties flown on that day.[70] Weyland spent the day coordinating the effort and trying to obtain updated target lists for his pilots from army air intelligence and air liaison officers in Brittany. On the following day, when bad weather forced cancellation of air operations at Brest, he turned his attention to improving support for Third Army in eastern France. Leaving the Brest operation in the capable hands of his combat operations officer, Weyland left on the morning of September 5 for the Third Army front with three specific objectives in mind: investigate potential new airstrip locations; discuss air support for the forthcoming offensive; and convince Patton that XIX TAC planes assigned to Brest would better serve Third Army in the east.

First, Weyland wanted to reconnoiter potential airfield sites in eastern France personally. Before leaving Chateaudun, he spoke with Ninth Air Force headquarters and requested five fields in the Reims area and several near St. Dizier for his groups then at Rennes and Le Mans, respectively. He also discussed using two airfields much closer to Third Army's Mosel front—Coulommiers (A–58) and Melun (A–55) near Paris—as rearming and refueling strips (**Map 4**). In fact, on the trip to Third Army headquarters on September 5, he stopped off to visit his airdrome squadrons in the vicinity. General Weyland also wanted to discuss Third Army's resumption of operations with Patton's staff. Because air and ground leaders customarily consulted on upcoming major assaults, Weyland had ample reason to fly to Chalons and consult with the staff on the air role in Third Army's joint plan for an offensive against the Mosel defenses.[71]

Early on the afternoon of September 5, Weyland conferred with Generals Patton and Gaffey and with General Haislip, commander of XV Corps. The

Haislip forces would attack in the direction of Luneville on the right of XII Corps, which had taken up positions opposite Nancy. Facing Metz, the XX Corps prepared to attack the next day, on the sixth, in an effort to pierce the Siegfried Line—*provided* its forces received sufficient gasoline supplies. Although operations reports for the first three days of September confidently alluded to securing bridgeheads and performing active reconnaissance to the east, Third Army basically had stalled. The situation began to improve when supply allocation rose and gas allowances increased on September 4. Of the 640,000 gallons requested that day, supply depots delivered 240,265. On September 5, air and rail shipments of 358,840 gallons proved sufficient for General Patton to order immediate resumptions of the advance.[72]

During the planning conference with Patton and his staff, Weyland also raised the third issue. He informed Third Army leaders that air support in the east would be restricted because all XIX TAC groups were reassigned to the Brest operation. It is not clear whether he asked Patton directly for help to reduce this commitment, although such a request probably would have been unnecessary. From early in the campaign, Patton considered Brittany a backwater of the war. On September 5, the day of his meeting with Weyland, he doubtless experienced relief now that VIII Corps and the Brittany Campaign, on the fifth, had become the responsibility of the newly formed Ninth Army. Whatever his feelings, higher authorities had committed his fighter-bombers to support non-Third Army missions. After the meeting, Weyland remembered that Patton agreed to seek release of the fighter-bombers in Brittany so they could support Third Army's attack to the east and into Germany. The XIX TAC commander certainly cannot be faulted for seeking Patton's help to escape or reduce a commitment that neither favored. Weyland knew perfectly well that the Brittany fortifications represented high-risk, low-yield targets for his fighter-bombers, despite AAF evaluations that suggested P–47s would have better success than medium or heavy bombers. Moreover, the air commander, like the ground commander, considered Brest a costly diversion from far more urgent military tasks.

General Weyland and his staff always maintained that the command's commitment to the Brittany Campaign, especially for two pivotal weeks in early September, prevented it from giving Third Army the vital support it needed during the final push to the German frontier. Third Army officers felt the same way. As for the Brest Campaign itself, it is hard to disagree with the military historian B. H. Liddell Hart, who concluded that "the diversion to capture the Brittany ports brought [to the Allies] no benefit."[73] Senior airmen subsequently deplored the use of air power at Brest as "wasteful and ineffective."[74]

There is much merit to the criticism. Despite 31 battalions of allied artillery available at Brest at the start, as days turned into weeks, the pressure mounted for more and more air support. One must remember, however, that

army planners in the late 1930s had designed army divisions for speed and mobility, which meant that medium rather than heavy artillery became the standard issue. As part of the compromise that would build up the air arm in the early 1940s, army leaders planned to rely on air power to augment artillery fire. Air leaders quite willing, even eager, to accept the expansion of aerial forces later seemed much less willing to accept the trade-off that would employ the fighter-bombers as flying artillery.[75]

After Brest became Ninth Air Force's primary objective on September 3, Weyland sent fighter-bombers from the two tactical air commands against every conceivable target holding up the ground advance there. These included dug-in troop positions, heavily fortified coastal batteries, and reinforced concrete pillboxes and fortress walls. On occasion he resorted to the air umbrella, the practice frowned on by doctrinaire air force leaders. Weyland's air umbrella in Brittany provided continuous four-plane air patrols to support each division. Nevertheless, VIII Corps ground forces made little progress until September 14, when accumulated attacks on seacoast batteries, specific targets in the city center, and constant pressure from the ground forces at last forced the defenders into the inner ring. Here, in the final assault, P–47s identified and attacked individual fortified houses in what amounted to house-to-house fighting.[76]

The postwar AAF Evaluation Board analysis proved highly critical of the indiscriminate use of air power at Brest, which it attributed to the absence of an air liaison or other advisory officer at VIII Corps headquarters. As a result, planners had inadequate knowledge about the effects of various bombing techniques, bomb fuzings, and related procedures. The evaluators also deplored the lack of coordination by target officers to produce an integrated target plan for the operation. General Weyland's difficulties in obtaining targets for his aerial forces certainly reflected this weakness. It seems surprising to find many of the same coordination problems that first appeared at Cherbourg reappearing at Brest.[77]

The tactical air experience at Brest, however, also revealed a positive side, at least by the later stages of the operation. Air-ground coordination, in particular, improved steadily during the campaign. Unlike the Cherbourg operation, air liaison officers now provided a VHF controller link that proved invaluable. Missions directed by the division air liaison officer who coordinated the use of fighter-bombers on airborne alert with division artillery batteries proved especially effective. In contrast with air operations in North Africa, air superiority and sufficient forces allowed the air-ground team to use the air umbrella effectively. Normally the P–47 groups flew 12-ship squadron-size missions and relied on three types of ordnance: two 500-lb. bombs, one 1,000-lb. bomb, or napalm-filled tanks. Brest was the first major test of napalm employed on the continent, and the jellied gasoline bomb rapidly became a popular and effective weapon when used properly. At Brest, fighter-

bombers dropped 133.2 tons of the firebombs. Airmen found that napalm proved most destructive when used on targets already partially destroyed and on deep shelters because of its adverse effect on the ventilation system. The use of napalm in attacks with ground forces in close proximity to the target suggests that air and ground forces had achieved a high level of coordination. Near the end of the assault on Brest, which fell on September 18, 1944, the XIX TAC historian could declare with good reason that "close air-ground cooperation was paying big dividends."[78]

Although the command lost only 12 aircraft during the entire September operation in Brittany, in terms of future value, the operation proved far too costly for the Allies. The German defenders destroyed the port facilities when VIII Corps troops finally overran the fortress complex on September 18. By that time the main Allied war effort had moved far to the east. Allied leaders decided not even to rehabilitate the Breton ports, relying instead on port facilities in Antwerp, Belgium. General Weyland, with some justification, could complain bitterly: "While this enormous air effort was being concentrated on such a small area, Third Army's eastward-pushing spearheads were covered very thinly with fighter-bombers.…"[79]

Back on September 8, 1944, just three days after their joint planning meeting at Chalons, Generals Gaffey and Gay asked Weyland for more air support of Third Army's Mosel crossing. Evidently Patton had been unable to secure a reduction in XIX TAC's commitment in Brittany, and the air commander explained how SHAEF's current air requirements for Brest affected the level of air support that he presently could furnish for the ground advance at the Mosel.[80] In fact, on September 6, the day after the planning meeting at Chalons, the command sent six of its eight groups on 33 of the day's 37 flying missions to Brest. This heavy concentration of air power in Brittany continued for the next two days. After that, however, the effort would decline to three groups on September 9 and 10, and normally two groups thereafter until the fall of Brest on the eighteenth. During this period, Third Army always received air support from at least two groups, and after September 12, it normally claimed about two-thirds of XIX TAC's daily mission allotment. Weather also played a role in allocating the air effort. Bad coastal weather at Brest could, as it did on the sixth, result in aircraft being diverted to Patton's front. Then, too, Patton carefully retained his airborne watch on the Loire River flank.[81]

Third Army probably received more air support than Patton could have expected after the Brittany assault began in earnest on September 3. Certainly he could have benefited from additional air support in September, but probably interdiction, not close cooperation sorties over his columns, would have proved most helpful. With the pause in mobile operations, his artillery now could support front line troops preparing to cross the Mosel. Tactical air support to isolate the Mosel battlefield seemed likely to produce the greatest div-

idends. Weyland recognized this, and the mission logs for mid-September show that armed reconnaissance rather than armored column cover missions predominated. It is here, with interdiction targeting, that the Brest commitment most seriously affected Third Army's potential for success. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that a major interdiction program in the Mosel-Rhine region, designed to prevent an intensive German buildup along the Mosel, offered the best role for tactical air power at the time. No amount of tactical air power, however, could move an army that literally had run out of gas at the end of August, an army that remained largely stationary the entire first week of September. Logistic constraints rather than insufficient air support proved to be Patton's real Achilles heel.[82]

Final Pursuit to the Mosel River

By September 18, 1944, with Brest captured and the Loire flank secured, the command could devote its full force and attention to Third Army's Mosel front. As important as the Brest and Loire operations became, General Weyland realized that his chief objective continued to be one of support for Third Army's main offensive. This meant moving his groups to Chalons and St. Dizier airfields in time to concentrate his air power in force on Third Army's front. Could XIX TAC relocate its groups to airfields in eastern France in time to affect favorably Third Army's operations? Weyland directed the majority of his time during the month of September to that end and his personal touch was evident throughout the relocation process. On September 6, the day after personally examining potential airfield sites, he joined General Quesada at Ninth Air Force headquarters in Versailles, where they, along with Generals Vandenberg and Nugent, allocated new airfields between the two tactical air commands.[83]

The XIX TAC received four fields in each region. Weyland approved of the selection, but later he would lobby—unsuccessfully—to be given the Reims-Champagne airfield as well. The main problem was that only two of the fields, Conde-sur-Marne (A–76c) and St. Dizier (A–64), could be used immediately (**Map 4**). Weyland had already chosen these as his *roulement* and emergency rearming and refueling fields in the forward area, and on the evening of September 6 he directed Colonel Ferguson to have the command's two airdrome squadrons move in, and the Ninth Air Force's service command representative to stock the fields with sufficient gas.

As for the other sites, five needed to be surfaced with square-mesh tracking material and the remaining two required extensive rehabilitation. The plan called for the St. Dizier cluster to have two of its fields operational by September 10, and two more by the thirteenth. The engineers expected the Chalons sites, with the exception of the *roulement* base, to be operational by

Maj. Gen. Richard E. Nugent, assistant chief of staff for operations, Ninth Air Force.

the eighteenth. That schedule, as Weyland learned, however, did not reflect operational availability. Vandenberg allowed only two of Weyland's groups, the 371st and 405th Fighter Groups in Normandy, along with the 100th Fighter Wing headquarters at Le Mans, to relocate to the St. Dizier area on September 10 (**Map 7**). The remaining six groups would have to remain in place farther west until the Brest Campaign's conclusion.[84]

Weyland also wanted to move his advance headquarters to Chalons as soon as adequate communications facilities could be established. The 405th and 371st Fighter Groups would be controlled by the advance headquarters until the 100th Fighter Wing became operational, while the 303d Fighter Wing would continue to control groups in the rear area until they moved forward. Complications arose in early September, when authorities decided to create a new command, the XXIX TAC, commanded by General Nugent, from units currently assigned to the IX and XIX TACs. General Nugent's command would support U.S. Ninth Army operations on First Army's left flank. From General Weyland's forces, the planners selected the 303d Fighter Wing for transfer, along with two as yet unnamed fighter-bomber groups. Nugent's new command would become operational on September 14,[85] and understandably he wanted the 303d available on the fourteenth. Weyland objected because his widely separated fields of operation required more decentralized command

and control arrangements than the IX TAC and he declined to give up the wing as long as the Brest Campaign remained active. As it turned out, General Vandenberg allowed the 303d to remain with the XIX TAC one more day, until September 15.

On September 10, the St. Dizier airfield became operational, and the 10th Photo Reconnaissance Group arrived from Chateaudun to fly missions from its new site. Ninth Air Force agreed to use medium bombers to augment resupply of the Third Army and declared the bomber resupply mission top priority. St. Dizier was the field selected. This troubled Weyland because it meant his own units' operations would be shorted, and the runways would suffer damage from the heavier airplanes. Yet, Third Army clearly needed special help for its worsening supply plight. As it was, airmen did not deliver the first bulk gas to St. Dizier until the twenty-first.[86] September 10 also proved memorable for another reason. On that date XIX TAC moved its advance headquarters to Chalons. The command historian confidently proclaimed that this move finally ended the communications problems between the two headquarters. Although another two weeks passed before the relocation could be completed, joint planning no longer had to include the X-Ray echelon, and at Chalons, Patton and Weyland were only 15 miles apart (**Map 7**).

While Weyland moved his forces to forward airfields as rapidly as possible, Patton confronted his supply problems. Supply shortages for the Third Army began to occur in mid-August.[87] The gas situation emerged as the most serious of all in early September. Even when fuel began arriving for the Third Army as promised after the third—by air, road, and rail—the stocks never reached the levels required. Ammunition stocks also had been seriously depleted, especially for XII Corps divisions attacking in the Nancy area. By September 12, Third Army had to request its entire airlift allocation be used for ammunition requirements.

Despite shortages of ammunition and fuel, Patton's forces continued a limited offensive, and on September 7, XX Corps units reached the Mosel south of Metz and forced a crossing. By September 9, elements of the corps established bridgeheads north and south of the city and U.S. artillery had begun shelling the forts. At the same time, XII Corps launched a coordinated assault to outflank Nancy. The corps could not capture the city, however, until September 15, while the Metz forts proved impervious even to shelling by 8-inch howitzers, medium guns. Even though all three corps had reached the Mosel, determined enemy resistance made it difficult to maintain bridgeheads. Progress became slow in all zones of the front.

Weyland realized the urgency of the situation. On September 12, he met with General Gay and 12th Army Group officers about the requirements involved in transporting his air groups to their new locations in eastern France. They had to come by rail from three different areas (**Map 7**), he explained, and it would take four trains to transport ground elements of two groups. The assis-

tant chief of staff promised to ask Patton and Gaffey for rail priority. Given the transportation bottleneck and Third Army's own desperate needs in September, it was not surprising that XIX TAC ground echelons improvised the move via a combination of rail, road, and air transport.[88]

The relocation experience of the 36th Fighter Group proved typical.[89] It had only been at site A–35 on the outskirts of Le Mans for 12 days when, on September 19, the command notified it to pack up for the journey to Conde-sur-Marne (A–76), 160 miles to the east (**Map 4**). The base was already familiar to aircrews as a rearming and refueling base for the longer missions from Le Mans. Unit personnel performed the now-familiar task of packing up tents and equipment and splitting into advance and rear echelons. The air echelon left on the nineteenth, with the rear following in stages. Most of the equipment made the journey by train, while the majority of the personnel arrived by C–47 aircraft. The group took nine days to complete the move, which must be considered admirable given the enormous transportation problems that existed throughout the Allied area in September. On the other hand, the nine days in transit loomed large for a command in a race against time.

Solving the enormous transportation problems that existed throughout the Allied area in September 1944 must be credited to the personnel of the Transportation Section, rear headquarters, Chalons, France.

The group historian declared the field at Conde-sur-Marne, nine miles northeast of Epernay, to be a virtual wilderness. What made the most impression on the new arrivals proved to be the mud, which they considered even worse than they remembered in England. On the other hand, at least the forward deployment meant better air support for the Army and it ended the practice of landing at forward fields to refuel, then flying the mission, and later landing at one of the eastern airstrips because of bad weather. The 354th Fighter Group historian recounted how, in past *roulement* operations, half the group might be grounded at forward bases or at their home base because of bad weather, with some continuing to fly missions from the staging sites for several days. For all its hardships, however, the *roulement* system clearly allowed XIX TAC to provide air support quickly to front line units, and it ensured the flexibility and mobility of tactical air power during the exploitation phase of combat in France.[90]

With Brest about to fall on September 17, 1944, General Weyland directed his combat operations officer, Colonel Ferguson, to have all XIX TAC groups moved forward and ready by September 25, for "all-out" operations in eastern France against German forces on the Mosel.[91] Yet would there still be time to make a difference against German defenses growing stronger by the day? From September 19–25, most of XIX TAC's missions consisted of armed reconnaissance flights against transportation targets in the Rhine and Mosel River valleys.[92] Despite these mission assignments, there is no record that General Patton complained that the air command now emphasized interdiction rather than close air support. With his artillery available on an increasingly static front, it made good sense to send the fighter-bombers to try to isolate the battlefield. During this period, however, poor weather interfered with strike missions, and tactical reconnaissance missions continued to report heavy enemy traffic moving into the Mosel region unhindered.

If General Weyland began to emphasize armed reconnaissance in late September, he did not neglect close air support missions. Many of these supported the celebrated 4th Armored Division, now engaged in heavy combat outside Nancy. Its division commander, however, General Wood, offered Weyland his only other encounter over command authority. One of XIX TAC's communications officers, Lieutenant Kiljauczyk, was temporarily serving with the 4th Armored pending reassignment. General Wood flatly refused to release Kiljauczyk on the grounds that XII Corps retained authority in such matters. Weyland, who did not brook lightly challenges to his authority, promptly telephoned the Third Army chief of staff, General Gay, who just as promptly settled the question in Weyland's favor. To their credit, General Patton and his staff invariably supported their air commander.[93]

Appropriately, the operational highlight that closed this period involved the same 4th Armored Division. Early on September 24, General Gaffey called Weyland and requested emergency air support for the division's Combat

Command B, which had come under heavy armored counterattack near Nancy. Despite poor weather, Weyland dispatched two squadrons of the 405th Fighter Group with 500-lb. bombs to rescue the force. Afterward, increasingly bad weather forced them to land at Etain and Weyland took the crews over to meet with a grateful Third Army staff. The following day, the 4th Armored Division sent the command a proper message of thanks, confirming that the P–47s had knocked out six Panzer tanks.[94]

On September 22, 1944, both air and ground advance headquarters began moving from tents to covered quarters at Etain, which meant that joint operations would be conducted together for the first time since early August. Circuit problems, however, cut out communications between Chalons and Etain, delaying the arrival of the bulk of XIX TAC's advance personnel and communications equipment until the twenty-fourth. By this time, Colonel Ferguson had met his commander's directive of having all groups in place for the all-out effort on September 25. Unfortunately, bad weather made the twenty-fifth the first totally nonflyable day of the month. That morning, General Patton, with General Weyland in attendance, addressed his staff, announcing that Third Army would go on the defensive until sufficient fuel and ammunition could be obtained.[95] Typical of Patton, this would be an aggressive defense, one in which limited attacks would be made to improve positions, while the troops prepared to resume the offensive and attack on the Nancy-Frankfurt axis when ammunition and supply permitted. The Third Army–XIX TAC team had lost the race against time and the mobile warfare of the summer and fall came to an end.

The French Campaign Reviewed

O. P. Weyland's report on XIX TAC's performance during the drive across France boldly asserted that aerial operations on fronts 350 miles apart proved "entirely practical because of the flexibility and range of air power."[96] The airmen made this possible in large part by decentralizing operations farther than established doctrine recommended or than planners originally intended. At one time, XIX TAC had groups based in three different areas and used *roulement* practices to stage from several others. At the same time, while the command echelon maintained air force control of its far flung units with diverse responsibilities, its task became increasingly difficult through late September. Too often, perhaps, General Weyland found himself a fireman scurrying back and forth, attempting to maintain control and ensure effective operations.

Air force tactical doctrine prescribed that control of air assets remain concentrated in the hands of the air commander, especially at the theater rather than the army level. Except for overall tactical air priorities, however, General Weyland held that control at the army level, and only occasionally did army interference demand his attention. During the battle of France, in only two

instances did Weyland consider his authority as the air commander endangered. One occurred when Third Army operations officers at Le Mans attempted to direct close air missions; the other involved the assignment of the XIX TAC communications officer serving with the 4th Armored Division. Neither situation involved Patton or his immediate staff. In both cases, at Weyland's request, Third Army's chief of staff acted promptly to settle the matter. The ability of XIX TAC to respond rapidly to Third Army's changing combat situations during the exploitation phase overcame tendencies by army officers to extend their authority into the air arena. From the beginning, the battle for France emerged as a joint operations campaign that required and received a high measure of cooperation and personal involvement. If the Allies enjoyed overwhelming air superiority and possessed the organization and forces to make joint operations function effectively, personal respect and trust among partners proved decisive, as the XIX TAC–Third Army team demonstrated.

Air-ground cooperation, of course, began at the top. The professional relationship between Weyland and Patton was one of admiration and mutual respect. Although Patton's ability to improvise is well documented, Weyland, too, showed that in the drive across France he could react to and meet changing situations with an equivalent flexibility of thought and action. However inexperienced in combat he may have been on arriving in England, Weyland proved himself a fast learner under fire. The XIX TAC commander emerges from the record as the tactical air commander in fact as well as in name. When ground authorities requested supporting action beyond the capabilities of his forces, Weyland quickly refused, while asking the Ninth Air Force to furnish the supporting action needed. Normally, these requests involved the use of medium or heavy bombers and night fighters. Only during the initial assault against heavily defended Breton ports in late August did Patton appear to disagree actively with his air commander, who opposed the use of his fighter-bombers in the attack. In this case, however, Weyland's hands were tied by senior Allied leaders once they set air priorities and decided on maximum use of air power to accelerate capture of the forts. A few days later, both Weyland and Patton worked together to free tactical air and reduce its commitment in Brittany during the major effort against the ports in early September 1944.

During the first two weeks of the campaign, Weyland met with Patton nearly every day. Normally, the Third Army inner circle consisted of Patton, chief of staff Gaffey, and assistant chief of staff Gay, although corps commanders attended planning meetings that involved major offensives. Third Army headquarters also conducted a regular morning briefing that Weyland attended as often as possible. Beyond this, however, Weyland's diary reflects frequent conferences and informal discussions with Patton and Gaffey on fast-breaking developments that called for air force assistance. Weyland normally would suggest the course of action and, once a course was approved, immediately contact his combat operations officer, Ferguson, to arrange the details.

Air Power for Patton's Army

The fast pace of combat in France in the summer and fall of 1944 meant that planning and decision-making frequently became more fluid, unstructured, and highly personalized. Only by mid-August did Weyland regularly attend the XIX TAC–Third Army nightly joint operations meetings. Even when the two headquarters were separated after August 14, Weyland did not rely entirely on his X-Ray liaison unit at the Third Army command post; instead he daily discussed with Patton and his staff current and future plans by phone or teletype. As often as possible, he flew his Stinson L–5 light plane or a P–47 aircraft from a XIX TAC airfield to Third Army's headquarters to discuss matters personally. Along the way, he invariably reconnoitered prospective airfield sites and visited his operating units.

If mobile warfare called for flexibility in action on Weyland's part, it also compelled him to modify doctrine over the course of the campaign. Although close air support remained third in priority for AAF tactical air forces, XIX TAC gave "first priority [to] cover of the armored units." Moreover, that support most often appeared in the form of air patrols dedicated to specific army units—the exact patrols that were found so objectionable in North Africa because they prevented the concentration of air power.[97] This close support of the armored forces and infantry divisions did not diminish the role of interdiction, as armed reconnaissance mission results demonstrated. Moreover, Allied air superiority, the first aerial priority, made possible the dual emphasis on isolation of the battlefield and close support of the ground forces in the first place.

If mobile land warfare called forth tactical air power's special capabilities, it also exposed its limitations. The extended lines of communication and the pace of the campaign put a tremendous strain on all elements of the command. The technology of the World War II communications network proved especially sensitive and General Weyland repeatedly had difficulties establishing and maintaining good circuits from advance headquarters to the wing headquarters and the fighter control center. The signals network depended on the fate of the airfield siting and construction program; both served to restrict

General Weyland often flew in a Thunderbolt from one headquarters to another to coordinate activities.

XIX TAC's efforts to keep up with a rapidly advancing Third Army. In Northwest Europe, as in other Atlantic and Pacific theaters, air power was built on the ground.

By September 1944, concern over aircraft shortages also arose within the command. Although the XIX TAC never had to curtail operations because it possessed too few aircraft, it had to adjust aerial operations to account for the uneven flow of replacement airplanes. For added flexibility, General Weyland set squadron size at 12 rather than at 18 aircraft, a 33 percent reduction. Moreover, the command, which normally possessed eight groups, found that flying more than two group missions daily (or a total of 72 individual aircraft sorties) could not be supported adequately, given the aircraft loss rate of 114 in August and 72 in September, when combined with the uncertain arrival of replacements.[98]

On the other hand, fighter-bomber groups never lacked for sufficient numbers of combat pilots during the drive across France. In fact, groups complained that they had too many pilots for available positions. Although aviator losses for the command totaled 64 in August and 92 in September, the August and September pilot replacement figures were 162 and 281, respectively. Fatigue became a concern. The strain of continuous combat encouraged the command to rotate pilots back to the states for recuperation normally after 200 combat hours. In doing so, Ninth Air Force policy, perhaps reflecting the overabundance of fighter pilots in the theater, required that such pilots be reassigned to other commands upon their return. Combat losses, rotation, and the heavy influx of new, inexperienced pilots led to a decline in the number of experienced group, squadron, and flight leaders, and this proved the most serious and persistent problem for the command.[99]

By September 1944, XIX TAC support units also felt the strain of the long lines of communication and difficulties in transportation. Aircraft maintenance seemed less affected than supply. The command's assistant maintenance and supply officer believed that maintenance in the command was the best in Ninth Air Force because of the coordination between service teams, depots, and the tactical units. The supply saga proved to be different, however. For the move to Chalons, which began on September 10, 1944, and took two weeks to complete, the supply section found itself short of truck transport and had to resort to the expedient of pooling group vehicles and of securing help from available rail and air transport.[100]

On balance, the conduct of mobile warfare on several fronts presented XIX TAC a challenge it never entirely mastered. Even the air commander's resort to extremely decentralized command and control and a rearrangement of mission priorities could not provide all of the air support wanted in Third Army's *blitzkrieg* across France. If, as the command declared, it proved capable of supporting diverse ground operations on widely separated fronts, it invariably found that concentrating its air power on one particular front caused a restriction in its coverage on other fronts. This became most evident in

September when the Brest Campaign in the west demanded substantial tactical air involvement at the expense of air operations in eastern France. Even with command of the air assured and substantial aircraft available, warfare's competing priorities overtaxed General Weyland's available forces; these events remind us that tactical air forces represent a costly, limited resource. Only late in the month could he muster his forces and concentrate them on Third Army's front. By this time, however, the plan of the air-ground team was thwarted by a combination of bad weather, limited night flying capability, Third Army supply shortages, and a new type of combat: positional warfare.

General Patton did not always appreciate the limitations of tactical air power. As General Weyland recalled, after their early successes the Third Army commander seemed to believe that the XIX TAC was capable of anything.[101] An overstatement, perhaps, but it reflected Patton's faith in the army–air team, a faith that never faltered. Even when chances of success on the Mosel diminished sharply in late September, he still found time to send an Associated Press reporter to Weyland to give the XIX TAC the publicity Patton thought he deserved, and "link 3d Army–XIX TAC as a team."[102] Indeed, for the peppery, judgmental Third Army commander, over the course of the campaign, General Weyland had proved himself and his command in the face of formidable and constantly changing operational challenges. In late September 1944, however, both men confronted another, more vexing assignment. Static warfare now would challenge the XIX TAC–Third Army team as never before. The Lorraine Campaign was about to begin.